

# THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

LOUIS-FREDERIC ROUQUETTE

NUNC COGNOSCO EX PARTE



THOMAS J. BATA LIBRARY  
TRENT UNIVERSITY









THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
NEW YORK . BOSTON . CHICAGO . DALLAS  
ATLANTA . SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED  
LONDON . BOMBAY . CALCUTTA  
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
OF CANADA, LIMITED  
TORONTO

54  
1977

# THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

BY  
LOUIS-FRÉDÉRIC ROUQUETTE

*Translated from the French by*

O. W. ALLEN

AND

A. LE REBELLER

*Decorations by*

LUDMILA TCHIRIKOVA

NEW YORK  
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1930



PO2635 - 9966713

COPYRIGHT, 1930,  
BY THE MACMILLAN COMPANY.

All rights reserved—no part of this book  
may be reproduced in any form without  
permission in writing from the publishers.

Set up and printed.  
Published March, 1930.

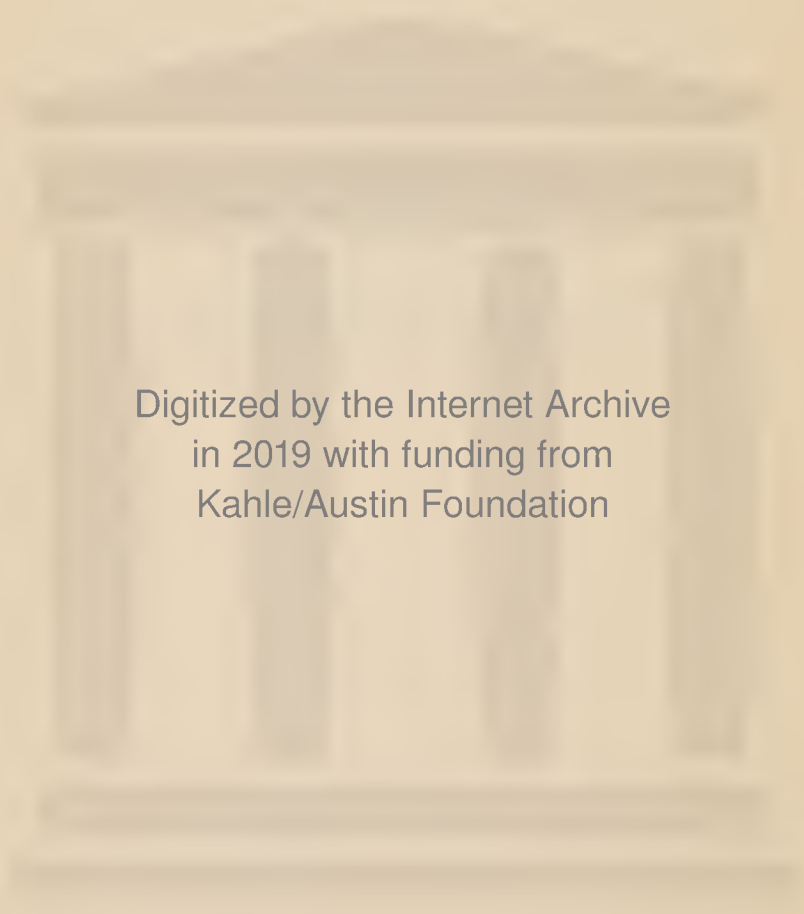
SET UP BY BROWN BROTHERS LINOTYPERS  
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
BY THE FERRIS PRINTING COMPANY

TO TEMPEST

A DOG OF ALASKA

WHO, BY HIS ATTENTIVE TENDERNESS,  
MADE ME FORGET MAN'S SUFFERINGS

FREDDY



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2019 with funding from  
Kahle/Austin Foundation



## CONTENTS

	PAGE
A VISIT THAT WILL SERVE AS AN INTRODUCTION . .	1
 CHAPTER	
I. THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE . .	11
II. SUPREME WISDOM OR THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS	53
III. KOTAK, THE INNUIT ESKIMO, ASKS A FEW QUESTIONS . . . . .	64
IV. SEAL CITY . . . . .	69
V. THE UTILITY OF UMBRELLAS AMONG THE THLINKITS . . . . .	77
VI. ON THE TRAIL . . . . .	87
VII. THE MAN WITH THE TOP HAT . . . . .	92
VIII. THE SOCIABLE BEAST . . . . .	116
IX. THE GNAWING BEAST . . . . .	126
X. THE MAN WHO FOUND A MAMMOTH . . . .	140
XI. THE VALLEY OF THE YUKON . . . . .	152
XII. PUSH, A DOG OF ALASKA . . . . .	159
XIII. THE MACHINE FOR MAKING DOLLARS . . .	168
XIV. A FAMOUS FISHING TRIP . . . . .	180
XV. A WONDERFUL HUNTING PARTY . . . . .	184
XVI. IN THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT . . . . .	195
XVII. THE DAMNATION OF FAUST . . . . .	202
XVIII. MY DOG TEMPEST AND I . . . . .	218
XIX. GOOD-BY, TEMPEST! . . . . .	228
EPILOGUE . . . . .	235



# THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE





# THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

## A VISIT THAT WILL SERVE AS AN INTRODUCTION

THE man came in.

Seating himself comfortably in an armchair, he placed his felt hat beside him, on the carpet, put one leg over the other, and said:

"Monsieur."

He said "Mon Sieur," in the English way, then added:

"I am a Frenchman."

I gave him a few words of welcome, but he cut me short with a sudden movement of the hand.

"I am the one who should be thanking you. You are a very busy man, and I am disturbing you. I know, I know. So I shall take only a few minutes of your time.

"Literature, whether it comes from France, from England, or from any other country, is sold like mustard, shoe polish, or Captain Cook's herrings. There is a display of posters, a beating of drums, and a man holding his hand to his mouth like a megaphone and shouting: 'Hello, folks! Read the novel of Mr. So-and-So. Mr. So-and-So

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

is a famous man. His last work reached a hundred editions of a thousand copies each.'

"To another type of audience the following information is given: 'Mr. So-and-So's novel is the best of novels. It may be read by old maids, country priests, and members of the Y.M.C.A.' Or else: 'This novel must not be put into the hands of old maids, country priests, and members of the Y.M.C.A.'

"In either case, the people buy—some in order to get wholesome and moral literature *ad usum puellarum*, others because they expect to find obscene situations and snappy descriptions.

"Pardon me, Mon Sieur, if I tell you that our elders—I mean the people that have reached the top—have rented all the billboards and other advertising space in sight. The young people get the lower part of the wall, the part that is spattered by passing busses and often sprinkled by stray dogs, in spite of the orders of the police."

"I don't see . . ." I ventured.

Energetically, the man cut me short:

"Yes, Mon Sieur, you do see, and I came here precisely because you see and know how to make room on the billboard for your friends who are in distress.

"I like you. Ten minutes ago I didn't know you, but you are just as I had pictured you. I mean to say that you represent the type of man that I had associated with your



## *A VISIT THAT WILL SERVE AS AN INTRODUCTION*

name. Doesn't that ever happen to you, Mon Sieur, this—what do you call it?—this trick of putting faces on names?"

Without waiting for my answer, he continued:

"I like your books. You don't pose as an artist; you are a bourgeois and you are not ashamed of your bourgeoisie. All right! And you depict it as it really is. By going to extremes, you might have won for your book the rank of a 'best seller,' as others have done. But you didn't want to. The academies make you smile. You don't try to monopolize virtue and you don't bring adultery into play. That's fine. You are helpful to literary apprentices. That's still better. I know, I know. Don't put on the airs of a colonel. In spite of your cold mask, your eye sparkles behind your spectacles. Is it mischievousness? No, it is kindness. That is why I am here."

And as if to prove his presence, the man braced himself in the armchair, shifted the position of his legs, and went on:

"You want to know who I am? Freddy. Yes, of course, I have another name, like everybody else, but what does it matter? I have been thirty-six years old for [he glanced at his wrist watch]—for two hours and thirty-five minutes. And these thirty-six years have been well spent."

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

He is silent for a moment, as if following the course of a dream. I avail myself of this opportunity to examine him at leisure. The light of the lamp falls full upon his face. Thirty-six years old! Impossible! I should have said that he was twenty-eight or thirty at the most. But on closer examination, I see that the face is bony, the cheeks hollow, the temples engine-turned with wrinkles, and the mouth distorted with a crease of bitterness. That man has suffered. Only his lips are young. They are of a bright red, redder and brighter on account of the pallor of the cheeks. In the full light of the lamp, the forehead displays keen intelligence, and the sunken eyes shine with a somber fire through the opening of the eyelids.

But the man has resumed his speech.

"I didn't come here to make a confession. I am not going to probe the wreck of my youth with the hook of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

"You want to know what I have been doing? 'A thousand trades, a thousand miseries,' my mother used to say; and my father used to add: 'Yes, you know a lot of things that will enable you to starve to death all your life.' That was wisdom.

"To tell the truth, I painted, sculptured, and wrote verses of from eight to twelve syllables about the sun, the birds, the flowers, and the spring; as if the sun needed me to radiate its glory, the birds to sing their frenzied trills,

## *A VISIT THAT WILL SERVE AS AN INTRODUCTION*

the flowers to enchant our eyes, or the spring to make us believe in the happiness of our souls!

"The narrow circle of the little town was too limited. Paris, that was the stage for me!

"Don't expect me to tell you of my wanderings in the big city. It was no longer a question of triumphs and laurels, but simply a matter of getting something to eat. The race for money—it's just like any other championship contest!

"Did I have the wolf at my door? Yes, a whole pack of wolves! Well, those things are over, and the Arabs say: 'The past is a corpse.'

"As for the thousand trades, I practiced them all. And as for the thousand miseries, I knew them all.

"I was—let me see, what shall I say? I ran about from one newspaper office to another in order to get an article published. I wrote songs, and was told: 'You write verse too well; give us something that is less polished—something in the popular taste.' And when the song was sold—for fifteen francs, Mon Sieur—I got six centimes whenever a singer saw fit to put it on his program.

"The theater was my hobby. Didn't one of my plays win a prize and get a medal, like an animal at a live-stock contest, when I was sixteen years old? 'Your acts,' I was told—'yes, they are very good. Take them to Mr. So-and-So, who will sign a contract with you—half the

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

royalties, plus twenty-five per cent for the manager of the theater and another twenty-five per cent for the director.' Mr. So-and-So puts down zero to my credit and keeps the rest for himself.

"I have been a secretary. I have been secretary a great deal in my life; and when I die, I have hopes of being hired by Saint Peter as clerk in the office in charge of admissions.

"As theatrical secretary—always secretary, you see—I had a hundred and fifty francs a month, fourteen hours of work a day, and a boss who vomited abusive language as naturally as another man speaks or breathes—a bloated brute who had a habit of sticking his hands into his vest pockets and saying: 'I am working in the interest of Art.'

"Next I acted as secretary for nondescript newspapers, then as secretary for a priest—yes, *Mon Sieur*, secretary for a good priest who had me translate Saint John Chrysostom and paid me when he had time. He was fond of saying: 'It is so fine to live under the staff of the Church!' Alas, his staff had lost its gilt! That man had no money and, of course, he couldn't steal any for me!

"Then I managed the political interests of the combined representatives of a department—three deputies and two senators. That brought me a hundred and forty francs a month, but the pay was rather irregular.

## A VISIT THAT WILL SERVE AS AN INTRODUCTION

"Then I let the Palais-Bourbon go to the Devil, put on a smock, and got a job as a painter—yes, painter—dauber, you know! I did wood graining in a bank, painted with red lead the T-beams of a building on the Boulevards, and put a coat of 'ignifuge' on the gates of the elevator shaft of the Barbès Subway Station. I worked with my hands, earned eight francs a day, and was happy. Alas, I had a hobby—yes, the literary bug. I abandoned the brushes for the pen and became the hack of one of our most congenial writers who, whom, of whom. . . .

"I have diplomas too, like every one else, if that interests you. I even earned some that I didn't get. I wrote two doctor's theses in economics and three medical theses. I sold my gray matter at the rate of fifty centimes a page, which was good pay for a hack.

"Then, tired of roaming about Paris on an empty stomach, I roamed about the world to get a change of ideas.

"I took my chance, as we say in America. I wandered from Ghadames to Agadir; I saw the oases of the South, plumed with palm trees; I slept in *bordjs* and in tents; I listened, in the evening, to the song of the *sokhrar*<sup>1</sup> of the Sahara rising straight into the pure sky like the smoke of incense; and intuitively I began to grasp all the grandeur, all the mysterious beauty of primitive people. Oh, how

<sup>1</sup> Camel driver.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

far I was then from the race for pennies, under the ink-bespattered sky of the City!

"I entered Morocco, the red city, thrice girdled with ramparts; and from the top of the *casbah* of Agadir I gazed for a long time at the ocean rolling its green waters as if to charm the burning land of the Barbary States.

"America? I am coming to it, Mon Sieur. Do I know it? From Punta Arenas, in the Strait of Magellan, to Point Barrow, at the extreme end of Alaska.

"What was I doing? Why, always following a thousand trades that brought a thousand miseries!

"I gave lectures on French literature when the literary bug took the offensive. Between times, I was a miner in the gold mines, a dog leader, and a sled driver.

"I was even the official representative of the French Government at a big fair somewhere out there in the Far West. It was war time, and after seven recruiting boards had refused me for the army, I took up some propaganda work. That was before the American intervention. But, there you are, for carrying on propaganda, there was a crowd of good people fit for active military service with whom the air of America agreed. For them I was 'that lousy scoundrel, that scab, shame on him!' What was he meddling in, that fellow? They clearly showed me what they meant. The chorus of the old men celebrated its victory by dancing the scalp dance to ancient music.



## *A VISIT THAT WILL SERVE AS AN INTRODUCTION*

"I had a bitter taste in my mouth, as if I had had a drink. I might have got angry and told the usual scurrilous tales. Bah! What was the use?

"I plunged into the virgin solitudes of the Great North. There I really enjoyed a rest for my body and a rest for my soul. It was a hard life, but it gave me physical and moral health.

"In fact, that is why I am here. Mon Sieur, here are some papers—yes, it's the same old bug. I have jotted down there, by fits and starts, my hours of peace and solitude, also the hours of gloom when the brain is in the clutches of despair.

"You will read these things—yes, thank you, but I should like to have you do more.

"You see, Paris with its scheming and its trickery was all right for my carcass when I was twenty, but not to-day. I am leaving everything. Yes, Mon Sieur, I am going back to the Great White Silence of the land of the pay dirt. You will read and you will see; once it gets you, it holds you forever.

"I should like. . . ."

For the first time my interlocutor stopped. He hesitated; then, making up his mind, he continued:

"If that is possible, I should like to have you publish it—somewhere. I shall not know about it, but it will bring me pleasure just the same. Unless you find the thing not

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

good enough, in which case I shall ask you to pay no attention to my request and to throw those worthless sheets into the fire."

The man got up, took the manuscript, laid it on the table, stooped to pick up his hat, and added:

"Good day, Mon Sieur."

When he had reached the door, he turned round, took three steps forward, and said:

"By the way, if the thing is published, there's one more favor I wish to ask. I wish you would put a name on the first page—*Tempest*. Who is it? My dog, of course! Do you think I am going to dedicate my book to a man?"

He shrugged his shoulders and went out.

\* \* \* \*

Have I dreamed this strange scene?

In any case, the manuscript is here. The writing is not very clear and is unsteady and almost illegible. The Devil with this fool! If he thinks I am going to decipher these hieroglyphics, he can go to the end of the world, he and his manuscript. . . .

Nevertheless, I have read it; and I am offering it to the public just as I have read it. And I beg the reader to believe that I have not changed a single comma. All that I did was to correct the proofs.



# I

## THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

IN a saloon on Montgomery Street, in San Francisco, I met a fellow who assured me that gold was being found on one of the Queen Charlotte Islands. "But," he added confidentially, "they're keeping it dark in order to avoid a terrible rush."

Having paid for this tip with many rounds of whisky, I needed no further inducement to make me strap my slender baggage and set out toward the regions of the North.

I made the trip in several stages. I could afford to take my time, for did I not have in my belt several hun-

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

dred dollars that I had torn from the earth in the vicinity of Alleghany, in Nevada county?

I idled away several days in Portland, the city of roses. Then, one morning, I took the train for Seattle, where I stopped forty-eight hours to exchange a hearty handshake with my good friend Marcelle de J., whose soul is abloom with poetry, like a French sweetbriar in the month of April.

\* \* \* \*

I am in Seattle, in the pretty villa that harbors the French Consulate. Before the door, in the middle of a little garden, stands the flagstaff from whose top flies the tri-colored streamer. Inside are two small drawing rooms where the perseverance of the hostess has contrived to reproduce the charm of her distant homeland.

On the walls hang a few engravings of rare taste. On a chiffonier of the period of Louis XVI the *Mercure de France* makes a mauve patch, and Farrère is there with his *Petites Alliées*.

Absent-mindedly I open the book, and my thoughts begin to wander.

A voice comes from behind me.

"You must like Farrère?"

"Very much."

The hostess observes me and says:

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

"I thought so."

"I like seafaring men. Everything that comes from the sea attracts me. I should have liked so much to be a sailor!"

"Is that a regret?"

"Yes, the greatest regret of my life."

"Oh! What a strange love!"

"It is a kind of love. And to gratify it, I got around the difficulty by becoming a traveler, since I could not be a sailor."

"I am grateful to that vocation that enables us to have you with us. It is so seldom that we have any one coming from France."

"Don't count on me for the latest fashions and the most recent gossip. I come from France, if you wish, but after a considerable detour through Texas, Arizona and California. To-morrow I am setting out for the Islands."

With a trace of emotion, Madame de J. then speaks of Paris, the Paris that she loves, the Paris of literature and theaters. I listen to the music of her voice. Names strike my unaccustomed ear: De Max, Lavallière, Bartet, Robinne. It is like a gentle purring that lulls my soul, soothes it, and puts it to sleep.

The name of a theater or the title of a book catches now and then my attention. It is like a film that is being reeled off, and I distinctly see the pictures and the scenes.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Meanwhile, what about the burning sands of Arizona that I have just crossed on horseback? And the Hopi Indians, so hospitable and primitive; and California and the good friends working with me in the mine? Who is right? She or I?

But the consul approaches with a smile.

"Will you have a cocktail, friend?"

A cocktail, by Jove! I am really in Seattle, in the State of Washington, out here at the end of the world, on the Pacific Coast.

\* \* \* \*

I go by water to Victoria. From Victoria I go to Vancouver, where I am lucky enough to find, on the very day of my arrival, an old freighter called the *Abraham Lincoln*, which carries the mail through the maze of islands.

The voyage? A bit rough, as must be expected in these waters, where one sails through narrow channels into which the wind and the sea rush with the sound of a pipe organ.

With more or less ease—rather less than more—we cross the Strait of Georgia, which skirts Vancouver Island. There is a lively dance when we pass the Cape Scott Islands and enter the Pacific. Belching, puffing, rattling like old iron, the *Abraham Lincoln* at last rounds the point of Cape St. James. Sailing around Prevost Island, our



### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

freighter leaves the Houston Stewart Channel and Skincuttle Inlet on her port.

We encounter more rough water in Juan Perez Sound with its trail of steep and rugged islets.

Throwing off a few sacks of mail at Lyell, we round Louise Island and stop at Skedons. Finally I land at Cumshewa, on the big island of Moresby; while the *Abraham Lincoln* continues her voyage toward Skidegate, on Graham Island, the most important of the Queen Charlotte Archipelago.

\* \* \* \*

At Cumshewa there is no more gold than under a donkey's hoof. For a few days I live on my savings. But I should have died of boredom had I not found work in a salmon cannery.

Time spent here—twelve days. A native Haida who is on his way to Skidegate invites me to accompany him. Shake! Off for the North! And there I am employed as a mechanic in a factory where oil is extracted from dogfishes.

I earn a few more dollars, which I am lucky enough to double at poker, and again take up my wanderer's staff, which is a figurative way of speaking when one jumps from freighter to ferryboat, and from ferryboat to liner.



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

It is easier to enter Graham Island than to leave it. Along the coast, ships like the *Abraham Lincoln* provide a rather irregular mail service. But I am fortunate enough to get a chance to cross Hecate Strait with some companions who are going to Port Essington, in British Columbia, for the purpose of renewing their supply of whisky, a matter of the greatest importance.

"Good luck, comrade."

And there I am alone, on the wooden pier of Port Essington, while my friends bend to the oars and pull for the open sea.

I make up my mind. I shall go aboard the first boat—steam freighter or sailing freighter—that passes in either direction.

Seventeen days later the *Princess Sophia*, of the British Columbia Coast Service, casts anchor opposite Port Essington, on the right bank of the Skeena, at Prince Rupert.

Fate is driving me northward. Onward, therefore, to the land of silence, land of mystery, land of snow and gold. Is it not the land of the *pay dirt*, the soil that pays? Pays for what? For determination, endurance? How does it pay? With the gold that is torn from the hard rocks? With the rigid beauty of the landscapes or the marvel of the Northern Lights?

With gold or with death—one or the other, and more often both—the hard-earned gold that flows through the

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

fingers like the waters of a torrent, and peaceful death that lays you out upon the shroud of the polar snows. The body sinks and makes a hole, and the snow bears down, down, down. The frost hardens it, and there the sleds mark their trail. The living speed quickly by, while the dead lie beneath in an unknown grave. And the soul rises and roams through the immensity of the starless night, accompanied by the song of the Great North that lulls it with the sound of crackling branches and the distant bellow of the caribou, maddened by the shrill laughter of the wolves, whose scent is suddenly brought down by the wind.

I am thinking of all these things on the deck of the *Princess Sophia*, sitting on my baggage, with my elbows on my thighs and my fists against my temples. The propeller churns the water with a rhythmic movement. A gray fog enshrouds the shore, though it is only a short distance away. The steamer threads its way through the long labyrinth of the islands and the jagged coast line. To the right slumbers Prince of Wales Island, fringed with spruce trees, while to the left night descends on Ketchikan, whose red and green lights scarcely pierce the fog.

*Princess Sophia.* Princess Wisdom! Is it madness to follow this route? The propeller throbs like a heart: "flook, flook, flook, flook." Is it yes, is it no? A new life is opening before me, and the verse of Terence comes to

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

my lips: "*The day that brings you a new life requires, in you, a new man.*"

"You ought not to stay there, boy; the fog is harmful."

I raise my eyes and meet the gaze of a woman clad in a tight-fitting gray sweater. She is standing, firmly planted on her feet, her hands in the pockets of her sweater. The collar conceals her neck, chin and mouth; and her knitted cap is pulled down so that it crosses her forehead at the level of her eyes.

"My name is Jessie Marlowe. What is yours?"

"Freddy."

"Freddy who?"

"Freddy nothing. Just Freddy."

"Oh!"

The woman pauses a moment and adds:

"You shouldn't sit still like that. That's always bad in these regions. You'd better come and take a walk with me."

And there we are, both of us, pacing the deck like old comrades.

"Is this your first trip to these parts?"

"Yes. Is it yours?"

"I'm already an old Yukoner. I've taken this trip five times."

"Where are you going now?"

"To Dawson, to join my husband."

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

"Oh! You're married!"

The tone with which I utter this sentence makes Jessie laugh, and her laughter is bright and clear.

"Yes, I married Harry Marlowe, the sergeant of the Mounted Police."

The Canadian Mounted Police! That splendid corps that would not have its equal if the Foreign Legion did not exist. Men enlist in the Mounted Police as they do in the Legion—with thoughtless haste or from love of adventure. They are wonderful human animals, daring to the point of madness, these men who, from Hudson Bay to Alaska, across the silent vastness of the Great North, represent the law of His Britannic Majesty.

Since then I have met hundreds of them, singly and in groups, in the course of my polar wanderings; and I have always found in them the qualities that make strong men: generosity, uprightness, kindness, and courage.

And yet, when I learn that this Jessie belongs to another man, even though that man is a sergeant of the Mounted Police, my nerves are set on end.

Come, come! What am I thinking of? Jessie Marlowe? Three quarters of an hour ago I did not even suspect her existence. Why, then . . .?

Why, then, now I know her! That's all.

The boat pitches violently, giving me an excellent pretext for seizing the arm of my companion, who, moreover,

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

does not try to free herself. Beneath the wool I feel the firm flesh and the hard muscles. She is a lithe and vigorous woman, my friend Jessie Marlowe.

I tighten my grip.

"Will you go with me below decks? There are some curious looking *chechaquos* there."

In the slang of the Yukon, *chechaquos* means all the newcomers at the mines—the apprentice gold seekers and fortune hunters.

We go below. There, in an inconceivable medley and topsy-turvy confusion, are dynamos, sacks, kegs, boxes, ropes, and iron girders—a jumble of picks and mattocks, and here and there, in a corner, a living creature upon whom falls the yellow light of an oil lamp that swings back and forth with the ocean swell.

Toward the center the space is less encumbered. There, seated on overturned buckets, men are playing cards on an improvised table.

The game is played in silence, and already the feverish excitement of winning is stamped upon the faces of the players. It is betrayed by the peculiar knitting of the eyebrows and the slight tremor of the hands that hold the filthy cards. Here man's vices are displayed without boast and without shame, with all the brutal openness of a gaping wound.

I turn round. Somehow I have the impression that I

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

have caught the glance of a wild beast in the eyes of my companion. Oh, it is only a fleeting glance, with a rapid contraction of the nostrils and a scarcely perceptible quiver.

I must have been mistaken, surely; for Jessie Marlowe says, with an indifferent air:

"I can't breathe here. What a smoking den! Are you coming, boy?"

\* \* \* \*

The next morning I come out on deck. Jessie is already there, leaning upon the railing.

She divines my presence and turns round. There is a look of anguish on her face. Without a word of explanation she says:

"Look, my dear boy."

I look, and behold in a bluish fog the most fantastic of landscapes. The shore is near, and we are maneuvering between Etolin Island and Prince of Wales Island, amidst huge projecting rocks, long chains of trachyte and gigantic causeways of basalt. Here the great geologic law asserts itself, far outstripping the paltry poetic imagination of the Hellenes with their Titans placing Pelion upon Ossa—mere childish play when compared with the chaotic vision that presents itself to our gaze.

In a supernatural effort to stop the invasion of the sea, Mother Earth has contracted her flesh. Volcanic rocks



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

have risen, and now stand there, without superstrata, laying bare the primeval granite.

With regular strata, sharp rents and pointed ridges, the mountain rises abruptly for hundreds and hundreds of feet—exactly as it stood on the day of the first upheaval, when it came forth from the bowels of the earth to say to the ocean: "Stop! Thou shalt go no farther!"

Jessie Marlowe's hand has seized mine. Suddenly the sun breaks through the veil of mist, tears it to shreds, and flings it far and wide. Its rays cast a golden glow upon that wall of ocher and sienna. The effect is wonderfully harmonious, and I feel Jessie's finger nails digging into my palm. A shudder shakes her form, but she at once recovers her composure and murmurs the inevitable "I'm very sorry." Then she abruptly withdraws, to punish me for having seen her shudder in the presence of the imperishable majesty of Nature.

\* \* \* \*

A hissing sound. A horrible cry. A rush of hurrying steps. More cries. I leave my stateroom in search of information. A group of men is coming up from the engine room. The groaning ends in a hoarse and prolonged wail. I make inquiries and learn that a coal-passer has been frightfully burned by a gush of steam. It is a hellish sight to look at. The empty eyes show two



### *THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE*

bloody holes. The distorted mouth is black and red. The whole body is one raw sore to which bits of clothing are still clinging.

The passengers rush forward, unable to render any assistance. The captain asks:

"Is there a doctor among you?"

The emigrants look at each other, and no one answers.

The captain insists:

"You're not going to let him die like that . . .!"

Then I remember that many years ago I studied for the examination of the Naval Medical School at Bordeaux.

The circle opens before me. I lean over the injured man. It requires no great skill to see that he is doomed. But in any case, I must shorten his suffering.

The first step is to remove the clothing that is sticking to the wounds.

"A pair of scissors or a knife," I request.

There is a sudden gesture, and a voice replies:

"Here."

It is Jessie Marlowe, who, from a leather sheath that she carries under her sweater, draws and hands me a diminutive dagger made of a single piece of steel.

At the same time she offers her assistance, and before I have accepted it, she crouches beside me and cuts off the cloth with a quick stroke.

The sight is horrible. The flesh is burnt and swollen,

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

puffing up and bursting with thin streams of blood. The veins and arteries are laid bare, and they too burst, one by one. It looks like an entanglement of red and blue strings on which the congealing blood makes a dark garnet stain.

Our hands meet. Mine is trembling a little, but hers is deft and steady. I look at the young woman, and I see in her eyes the brief flame of the day before.

That flesh that is suffering the punishment of the damned produces joy in the eyes of this woman. I could swear to it.

I give a brief order. With infinite caution they raise the suffering body and carry it away, while Jessie Marlowe murmurs in a low voice, as if to herself:

"How splendid those bright colors were!"

\* \* \* \*

Night is falling. The steamer glides silently through the narrow waters of Wrangell Strait. Here and there is scattered a line of buoys, warning the ship of the reefs that suddenly rise from the depths to the surface of the water. Now and then we see the rocks, crouching, as it were, like stealthy beasts. They seek to snap the easy prey; but we pass by, and the foam of our wake hides them from view.

Spruce trees growing there, Heaven knows how, lean

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

over until they touch us. The slanting rays of the sun light up the high, black cliffs, while behind us we leave a dark abyss.

Suddenly the basaltic wall is indented, and an immense glacier appears, falling sheer into the sea. On its virgin whiteness the wind sweeps the recent snows, and the sun produces a shimmer of purple, orange, and blue lights. A bird flies past, and for a long time its pink wings are seen flapping in a sunbeam.

From the heart of the ship comes the ceaseless groaning of the dying man, who is leaving this life, step by step.

\* \* \* \*

We leave Juneau in the morning, after stopping there overnight. We cross Gastineau Channel. Alaska's capital lies buried in a fog, upon which the Capitol Building, with its back to the mountain, makes a milky spot.

Near me a voice speaks:

"You didn't go ashore, doctor?"

It is the captain who addresses me with this appellation. I have been promoted since yesterday.

"No, captain."

"You were quite right. It isn't worth while to come as far as this to see factories, autos and movies. You might as well stay in Seattle or Vancouver."

The captain draws two or three puffs from his short

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

clay pipe, remains for a moment leaning on his elbows beside me, then moves away with the characteristic gait of a sailor, heavy and agile at the same time.

Three paces away, he faces about and says:

"By the way, you know, the man died last night."

He sends a squirt of yellowish saliva over the railing and adds:

"Jessie Marlowe got off at Juneau."

"At Juneau! But wasn't she to land at Skagway and go on to Dawson?"

"Yes, doctor, but she changed her mind."

And he moves away, rolling his shoulders and grumbling:

"She's a woman."

An invisible hand clutches my throat. The man is dead. Jessie Marlowe is gone. An overwhelming sadness comes over me, and I cannot tell exactly whether the real cause is the death of the man or the departure of the woman.

\* \* \* \*

The thermometer has dropped twenty degrees in a few hours. Winter has arrived all at once.

The river, which but yesterday rolled along its black waters, carrying life to the land of the pay dirt, is to-day motionless, gloomy and silent. For six months the Yukon will be a prisoner of the ice. The turbulent monster is

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

in chains. With stealthy advance it has blocked the barges, and a large paddle-wheel steamer has allowed itself to be caught.

For eight months Dawson will lie beneath the snow.

The great polar shadow falls upon the land, while the night devours the day. And until the day takes its revenge and in turn devours the night, I must lay in a store of wisdom and philosophy.

The landscape interests me by its novelty. I am on a height outside the city, in a cabin built of spruce logs joined together and looking more like a roost than a human habitation. At my feet the city and the river are spread out in a symphony of white on which, here and there, the spruce trees form patches of dark green.

Opposite rises the mountain—the last spur of the Rockies—daubed with ocher and coated here and there with a white that shades into blue.

I have plenty of time to behold these things, so I devote my first day of winter to household cares. I inspect my boots, put on a heel, and nail down a sole. I am sewing a fox skin to the collar of my leather jacket, when my door opens and in comes Lynn, my good friend Lynn.

Lynn is a flat-faced Koyukuk Indian who, in spite of his contact with civilization, clings to the ancestral custom of daubing his cheeks with paint.

He wears a big checkered plaid which formerly must

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

have belonged to some roaming lass, and a thong of buffalo hide girds his waist. His sealskin moccasins, fringed with wolverine, trail their laces on the floor. His hands and arms are imprisoned in fur-lined mittens of leather, tied at the elbows, and suggesting the hands and arms of a marionette.

He would be rich in local color, my friend Lynn, were it not for the horrible derby hat that is proudly perched on his head. This derby is for Lynn the supreme mark of civilization.

One other concession this Indian makes to our society. He has adopted the frightful habit of chewing gum.

After chewing more vigorously than usual and lodging the wad in his left cheek like a chew of tobacco, Lynn greets me in Koyukuk fashion, inquires after my health, and informs me that a man's corpse has just been picked up in the heart of the city of Dawson, near the bridge over the Klondike River, at the very spot where Front Street comes to an end.

With this sudden drop of the thermometer, the incident is not surprising. Probably some drunkard who left the *Bank*, the *Exchange*, or the *Green Tree*, at a late hour, and was brought down by a congestion of the brain.

Lynn listens to my supposition and shakes his head. He chews his gum for a moment, then adds in his somewhat guttural English:



### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

"No, no. The man is a sergeant of the Canadian Mounted Police. He wasn't killed by the cold, but by the wound that he has in his neck."

And Lynn concludes:

"It's making a big stir in town."

Then, after borrowing two handfuls of tea, the Indian goes out, dragging through the snow the moccasins with the trailing laces.

\* \* \* \*

A sergeant of the Mounted Police! Gee! Big game this time! That will give us a rest from the disputes in which the miners are usually the actors.

Though the city has long since forgotten, like a horrible nightmare, the legendary fights of former days, when gamblers were picked up at dawn, their bodies more or less full of holes; still, even now there are scoundrels who occasionally settle their disputes with Brownings. But a sergeant of the Mounted Police! Whew! My whistle of surprise makes my dog prick up his ears.

"Suppose we go out and get the news, Tempest, my friend. What do you say? A sergeant of the Mounted Police who has been actually murdered—that's something you don't see every day. And besides, it will drive away some of the monotony of this day, which refuses to come



## *THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE*

to an end. Also it will be an excellent chance to show off our new fur collar."

I place my otter-skin cap securely upon my head and put on my jacket with its famous collar. Tempest yelps with joy, and off we go, running along in the snow like two young fools. We come to a slope, and down we roll.

"Come, that's enough. Let's be serious."

With a back stroke of my hand I brush off the snow and enter the town with Tempest at my heels.

In front of the barracks of the Mounted Police a crowd is holding a discussion with many gestures and a variety of opinions. As experts, the old Yukoners admire the "fine blow" that sent the sergeant to the other world.

A friend offers to take me in with him. He knows a chap who can give us information.

With no great difficulty we enter the barrack yard. There we see prisoners dressed in the traditional costume of black and yellow, digging roads through the snow.

The man we are looking for is in his room, getting ready a pair of snowshoes. Ten men, in fact, are going to scour the country in an effort to seize the murderer while the inquest is being held in town.

As for details, the man knows no more than we do. The sergeant was found in the morning, frozen stiff, at the very place that Lynn had mentioned.

Putting the snowshoes under his arm, the policeman

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

suggests that we go and see the victim. In a low room, the sergeant is stretched out on a camp bed. A few comrades are watching over the body and smoking cigarettes.

The victim's head is turned slightly to the left, and one sees under the ear a triangular wound. It is clean-cut and not a half inch long, but through that hole the man's life has fled. It is indeed a "fine blow."

"It's the only clew we have," explains another sergeant, "but it's enough to find our man."

"Poor Harry Marlowe!" says our guide.

Harry Marlowe! Harry Marlowe! I know that name. Where the deuce have I heard it before?

Ah, yes! I remember. The *Princess Sophia*! Jessie Marlowe! Four months have passed since then. The cares of getting settled have made me forget that meeting.

Distinctly I hear that voice telling me:

"I married Harry Marlowe, the sergeant of the Canadian Mounted Police."

Jessie Marlowe, the girl who haunted my memory for a few hours and was seen no more!

Repeating the words that I have just heard, I also say, but with a slight change: "Poor Jessie Marlowe!"

\* \* \* \*

On entering, I see only the corpse laid out on the bed and the dead man's comrades keeping watch. My eyes

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

now wander to the end of the room, where I see a woman whose back is leaning against the wooden partition wall. Her arms are folded over her breast. Her attitude is fierce and defiant.

"Jessie Marlowe," whispers my companion.

You may be sure that I recognize her. You don't forget Jessie Marlowe when you have once seen her.

Her eyes are fixed; her jaw is set. She is overcome by her deep grief. Niobe defying fate could not have been more beautiful.

Poor Jessie Marlowe! I sincerely pity her and should like to be able to go to her and say, not commonplace expressions of condolence, but words of affection, or rather to say nothing at all, but simply to take her hand and weep with her a long, long time.

I dare not do it. The people who surround us embarrass me. Besides, Jessie's look is by no means reassuring. In her corner she is crouching like a wild beast, insensible to everything but her grief.

What is she thinking of? What landscape does she call to mind? What memories? Is it her ruined happiness, her home broken up? Is she thinking of the past or of the future?

The past? The rambles on horseback toward the limitless horizon, the solitude, the tender solitude of two persons during the long polar nights? The dangers escaped together? The first clasp of their hands?

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

The future? The uncertainty, the problem of earning one's daily bread, the return to the house where everything speaks of the absence of the loved one—his seat, his glass, his knife, his gun hanging on the wall, useless evermore?

What does she behold in her inner thoughts? Do her eyes look without seeing, or do they gaze at a distant point in their bewildered dream?

Why am I obsessed with the absurd idea that her dilated pupils, with their hypnotic gaze, behold in the room only the triangular wound in the neck of the man who was her husband?

\* \* \* \*

"Tempest, old pal, why do you keep turning round like a rich man's dog in a park? Why the Devil don't you keep still? Make better use of your halt. Get some rest."

My good advice—like all good advice—is useless.

Tempest moves to and fro, running up to his mates, who are cracking in their strong jaws the pieces of frozen seal that I have thrown to them. Strange to say, my leader Tempest does not try to steal their prey. He turns restlessly, raises his nose into the wind, moves, in turn, the right ear and then the left—both of them pointed attentively—then comes back toward me, sits down on his hind quarters, opens his mouth, and whines.

I wipe my aluminum plate with a bit of bread.

"Here," I say, holding out my hand.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Tempest turns his head away. He refuses my present and whines again. Suddenly he dashes up to his mates, who are finishing their meal, and bites their hind legs.

Frightened, the beasts disperse. Tempest calls them back with his voice—a bark sharp as a command. The obedient dogs assemble. He places himself at their head, and my battalion begins to move. A short bark brings the troop to a halt before the loaded sled that I left an hour ago, in the shelter of a clump of miserable dwarfed spruce trees, lost in these polar solitudes.

Tempest leaves the dogs under control and comes up to me. This time he does not bark, but looks at me. I read in his eyes as in a book, and his eyes say to me:

“Well, what are you waiting for? Don’t you see that we are ready? Come, let’s go, hurry!”

“Tempest, old fellow, you’re crazy. We have just arrived, and you want to be off again. The sled is heavily loaded, we have had a hard stage, and your brothers are tired. They haven’t all legs of steel like you. We’ve been on the road for a week now, and I myself feel as if my back were broken. It’s mild here, and there’s no wind. Be patient, be patient! ‘Some weather makes you wet, and some weather makes you dry,’ as they say in Languedoc. But you don’t understand the language of my forefathers, so shut up.”

This speech, accompanied by a gentle tap, does not sat-

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

isfy my friend. He is sensitive, however, to what he thinks is a caress. He approaches and, with his hard and bumpy head, begins to butt me as would a ram.

"I must obey you. All right! But really you are unbearable."

With a sharp click I close my knife. He understands the signal and is proud to have made himself understood. He leaps and yelps with joy, and his tail assumes the shape of a snail shell. Cursing my weakness, I put away my plate, after washing it with a handful of snow, and I buckle my sack.

"Let's move on, since that is your wish. You are the master of my life. Lead the way, and I shall follow."

While I am harnessing his mates, Tempest remains at my side, watching my every move. When the last strap is fastened, he takes his place in front. Scarcely is his harness secured, when he raises the parting cry and dashes forward at breakneck speed.

I have just time to leap upon the *taku*, where I land on my feet, the reins in my hand.

Tempest has the Devil in him. He strains every muscle and with his cries urges on the other dogs, who are soon won by his remarkable zeal and, in turn, put forth every effort. If one of them lags or slackens his speed, the dog beside him bites his legs.

They are intoxicated with speed. Never has my team



## *THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE*

put forth such an effort. In vain I try to dampen their ardor. Who can make these Labradors and Huskies listen when they are led like maniacs by a fool like Tempest?

I give them the reins and let them go. They redouble their ardor on feeling that they are no longer held in check. We make fantastic turns. My team is hitched in Indian style, and the fan closes automatically. We skirt the brink of dark chasms and brush against spruce trees whose branches lash my face as we pass.

"Hey, you devils, stop!"

The team no longer obeys my voice. With lolling tongues and heaving sides the dogs follow Tempest, who pulls, pulls, pulls.

I feel sure that at the next turn we are going to be dashed to pieces. No such thing. The turn is made with a skillful curve. We shoot down a slope, and here we are at last on the plain.

Not until then does Tempest stop. He stiffens his legs, as if to hold back the load all alone. Fortunately, the other dogs have also checked their speed. I myself am brought to my knees, but the dogs receive a terrible shock. The sled glides onward, and three dogs sink howling into the snow. I rush forward. A hasty examination reveals that nothing is broken. I spring onto the seat.

"Come, brothers, let's go!"

### *THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE*

Not one of them stirs. I get off and urge them with my voice.

"Mush on, mush on, boys."

It is useless. To defy me, Tempest lies down on his side. I take my whip and make it crack. I pull on the straps. The dogs have not moved forward an inch.

"You're not going to leave me here, I hope?"

Then Tempest gets up. With his forepaws he digs the ground and throws the snow right and left.

"Do you want to rest? I know you brought us here at an unusual speed, but this is not our goal."

Tempest's only answer is to scratch, scratch, scratch at a furious rate.

Discouraged, I unharness the team. Once free, the dogs make their holes, as if to lie down. Soon the snow is cleared away, leaving a fairly wide opening in which the beasts crouch.

Tempest finishes his hole before the others, but comes out of it immediately. His large, kindly eyes look at me and say:

"Well, aren't you going to bed too? Quick, quick! Do as we have done!"

He goes to his shelter, comes back to me, and does not take his eyes from me again.

Then I decide to follow his example, on this immense plain where nothing lives and where nothing is to be

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

seen. I push aside my sled, take out my tools, and begin to construct a shelter for the night. In haste I make a snow hut, an igloo like those of the Eskimos. A little water thrown over the blocks unites them more solidly than the best mortar.

At the base I make a narrow door, through which I crawl. This entrance leads to a circular room fifteen feet in diameter. Upon the beaten ground I throw two seal-skins and a blanket. I prepare a place for my canteen, and improvised shelves are soon ready to receive my articles of daily use.

The keystone of the vault is a squared block of ice. From it I hang my lamp, a primitive lamp in which burns a wick floating in seal oil. The smell always sickens me a little. My civilized nerves are still oversensitive.

I go outside. My dogs have disappeared beneath the snow. Tempest alone is awaiting me on the threshold. His eyes gleam with satisfaction, and he wags his tail contentedly as I pat his sides. Happy, he disappears into his hole in the snow.

A little astonished, I return to my igloo. Raising my head, I see before me, above the mountain that we have just descended at such a vertiginous speed, a whirlwind approaching with the swiftness of a galloping horse.

"Ho, ho! We are going to have a hell of a blizzard."

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

And I understand, all at once, the haste of the dogs and the intelligence of Tempest, who foresaw the hurricane. He felt that it would mean death if we were overtaken by it on the mountain. This animal, with his unerring intelligence, sensed the situation. He has simply saved my life.

I test my igloo with my fist. It is as hard as granite. Now let the blizzard come; I defy it. Philosophizing about animals in general and Tempest in particular, I creep into my shelter on all fours, while the howling of the storm approaches and passes like the sound of galloping horses.

Speaking of cursed blizzards, this is certainly one. The snow falls, thick and violent, and is swept away in whirlwinds by the storm. It must be rather uncomfortable on the mountain trail at this hour.

Selfishly I relish the joy of being under shelter. I lounge upon my skins, stretched out at full length, my hands behind my neck and my legs extended toward the fire, over which the copper kettle is singing.

For a moment I am interested in my steaming mocasins, and then it is the low flame of the lamp, so much like a yellow eye, that holds my attention. I feel strong, I feel healthy, I feel happy.

The gale, sweeping all before it, rages past and rushes straight for the plain like a maddened beast.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

The soul of the coffee awakens, rises slowly like a perfume, and soon fills my room. My nostrils quiver, my eyelids are half closed, and through my lashes I still see a tiny luminous point piercing my night. Softly the curtain falls, and I glide into the realm of dreams.

And my buoyant soul leaves its covering of flesh and flits about. It circles around the room, then dances before the low flame. Flying around the light, it is soon attracted by the flame and identifies itself with it. The soul of fire, with its original purity, has taken the soul of man and purged it of all the baseness of the flesh. The flame descends from the primitive lamp and wanders, in turn, hither and thither, yonder, still farther, here and elsewhere. I try to seize it, but a burden weighs me down, overwhelms me, and nails me to the spot.

The twinkle of my eye is gone. I am blind; and yet, in my internal night I behold the star that led the faithful on their way to worship the Holy Images.

A sudden leap, and the flame is gone. It is night, a limitless December night, cold and blue. No, there it is again! Once more it animates the friendly heart of the lamp. A lamp! No, it is a light burning in the temple. It is enshrined in rich metals, amidst pure gold and precious gems. It is the fierce heart of Islam burning in the sanctuary of Mulai-Idriss. Yes, Mulai-Idriss. I am in Fez. Here is the *sook* and here is Shemmaim Street with

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

its vendors of dates, figs, candles and cakes—grave and peaceful merchants, crouching and waiting for a customer, while counting with uniform gesture the oblong beads of their chaplets.

No, it is the lamp of Julian—Julian keeping watch in his palace at Lutetia, in quest of the Truth.

The monogram of the Galilean flashes upon the Labarum that bears, like a halo, the prophecy revealed to Constantine: "By this sign thou shalt conquer." But yonder, beyond the hills, rises the eternal God of Light—Mithra, Father of the World.

Helios or Christ? Which will it be? The restless legions are waiting.

Night again. There are dark corridors into which one creeps and penetrates with the frightful sensation that the passage is getting narrower and the ceiling lower and lower. But now the light reappears, attached to the caps of miners. Men toil with prodigious labor, to tear from the earth the black stone that carries within it the principle of fire. Why no, I am mad! That is not coal, but gold! The walls rise to a dizzy height. The little flame is transformed into a frightful brasier. The vault, the walls, the floor—everything is of gold. The yellow metal lights up the night with its radiance; it is a revolving sun of fireworks that throws streams of sparks against the walls. I too am of gold. The gold flows in streams, pene-



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

trates my flesh like a rain, and circulates through my veins; while the blood, driven out, returns to my heart. I am dying, the weight is crushing me. . . .

\* \* \* \*

"Damned beast! What are you doing there?"

I straighten up and recognize Tempest.

"Tempest, my friend, you're an ass; yes, an ass."

Did you ever see such manners? The cursed fool comes in without warning, places his paws on my chest, and bears down with his whole weight. Do you think he is sorry? You don't know the beast. He is happy in his insolence, and his grinning face expresses his delight in having awakened me.

"What! Say, old chap, you don't intend to go out in this weather! Go to the Devil; but go alone, if that's your fancy."

I say that as a matter of principle, because I know myself and realize that in the end I shall go where Tempest wishes. Tempest wants me to go out into the hurricane and the cold. Let us listen to him. He is a wise dog. And a dog's advice must always be followed; it is not like the advice of men.

I put on my gear and go out. The storm seems to have abated. Tempest dashes off with his nose to the snow. A hundred paces away, he stops and sends up a bark of

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

distress. I run up, and perceive a form that the snow is slowly covering with its icy sheet.

"Hello, old boy! You've chosen a bad place for your sleep. You'll never get over this, I assure you."

I shake the body violently. It is an inert bundle. The wind, having subsided for a moment, whistles again, piercing and shrill. Thousands of needles are pricking my skin. I must come to a decision.

Up you go! I place my comrade on my shoulders. A *chechaquo*, no doubt. He must be a greenhorn to continue his journey through the mountains in such weather as this.

Tempest follows with his nose at my heels. I slip my burden through the opening of the igloo into the room, which I enter in turn. Unceremoniously Tempest does the same. Evidently the sight interests him.

The stranger is lying face downward. I turn him over in order to give him first aid, and discover that the poor imprudent devil is a woman and that this woman is Jessie Marlowe.

\* \* \* \*

Jessie is soon revived by a few swallows of whisky and especially by the good fire that I have made. Like a true Yukoner, she shows no astonishment at finding me at her bedside. People live on such adventures in this country.

"Is it you, Freddy?"

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"Yes."

With a spontaneous gesture she holds out her hand.

"Thanks."

That is all.

I know how grateful one should be under such circumstances. I grumble something that means: "It is nothing; don't mention it. You would have done the same thing."

In this country one never questions a guest. He is welcomed, no matter whence he comes or whither he is bound.

Jessie's condition is not too serious. Why insist? Besides, I tell you that it is not the custom.

"You have tea there in the can, coffee in the pot, whisky in the bottle, and cigarettes in my canteen. Here are a sealskin and a blanket. Lie down and go to sleep. Good night."

"Good night, Freddy."

"Good night."

After a moment of silence I add:

"All the same, it's more comfortable here than out there."

Jessie crouches before the fire, and her stern gaze is fixed upon the flame.

Another pause.

"Are you asleep, Freddy?"

"I'm not sleepy."

"You're not very talkative."

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

"Perhaps not."

"Are you angry with me?"

"Bah!"

Outside, the wind sweeps the plain, driving the snow in clouds before it. The howling begins again. Jessie shudders. Her shoulders shake convulsively. She draws closer to me. I am about to get up.

"No, stay there. You are comfortable; stay there, please."

She sits down quite near me, takes my hand, and in one breath hurls at me these three syllables:

"I'm afraid. . . .

"Yes, friend, I'm afraid. Protect me. I have just passed through hours of horror. Overtaken by the storm, my team fell into a ravine. It's a miracle that I escaped. A false movement threw me upon the trail, while my howling dogs were dashed against the sharp rocks."

She continues, in the same low tone, as if making a confession:

"It isn't the storm that frightens me. It's the men. The Mounted Police are tracking me—yes, me, Jessie. They accuse me of murdering Marlowe. . . .

\* \* \* \*

"This has been going on for three weeks. Such torture is terrible. From camp to camp I wander on, and scarcely

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

have I settled, when I have to set out again. Half of my dogs died in their harness, and you know where the other half is. I have nothing left—neither dogs, sled, clothes, nor supplies. Nothing, absolutely nothing—not even a lighter or an ounce of gold. You really should have left me in the snow. That's a sleep from which there is no waking. They've been on my trail since last night. I took a short cut across the mountain. Was it madness? Yes, I know it. I would even have gone over the ice field, if necessary. I don't want to be hanged. I'm afraid of death. I'm afraid, I'm afraid!"

The woman hangs upon my neck, with up-turned eyeballs, and all the muscles of her face so tense that one would say she wears a mask.

Then she begins to coax me tenderly:

"Keep me, keep me with you. Don't drive me away. I swear to you, dear, that I didn't murder Marlowe. I didn't do it! I didn't do it! But I am accused. Jealousy and stupidity, those two twin sisters of man, are after me like a ravenous pack. I'm a wretched woman imploring your mercy. . . . I was so crazed that I ran away. I ought not to have done that; that's where I made a mistake. Don't hand me over. . . . You understand me, even though you've seen so little of me."

These are the words that Jessie should not have spoken.

Why did Jessie say these things—Jessie the danger-

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

hunter in search of the unknown? Yes, yes, I remember the scene—your eyes lit up and intoxicated with the suffering, your nostrils sniffing in the pain, your nerves straining toward impossible desires. . . .

But to kill a man, her own husband—that is impossible! I take in my hand the delicate hand of the young woman. It is a hand with slender fingers and a delicate wrist. No! That living hand that lies in my living hand could not have dealt a death blow.

I venture vague words of consolation:

“They have probably lost trace of you. How do you expect them to find us now? The hurricane has swept the trail, and it would take a clever man to read in the snow. The tracks of the sled, the claws of the dogs, your footprints and mine—all that has been effaced forever, even admitting that they are trying to find you. The mountain is not very safe to-night, and the Devil himself could not get through.”

Tempest stirs, goes to the low door, sniffs and barks.

In a frenzy Jessie cries:

“The devils have come through. There they are. There’s no doubt about it. There they are.”

Above the roar of the storm are heard the yelping of the weary pack and the shouts of the drivers urging them onward:

“Ehahayaha! Ehoyoho-o-o. . . .”



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Tempest is about to dash forth. Jessie leaps forward and falls in front of the dog, at the very moment when he reaches the door. We are on our knees, forming a strange group. The dog stares at us with astonished eyes.

If he barks, we are lost.

I take his head in my arms and say to him with my mouth to his ear:

"Tempest, *bijo mio*, be still, don't be mean! Have pity on the miserable creature that is there at your side. You're not a man, but you're a good dog. You have a heart that is simple and true. You know nothing of the terrible schemes and the motives behind men's actions—falsehood, greed, jealousy, and thoughts that haunt the brain day and night. . . . They are going to pass by . . . hear them . . . they are looking for their prey!

"See how insignificant we are. One bark from you, and that body is doomed. That is a small matter, but what will become of the soul?

"My good dog, my priceless Tempest, my brother, my friend, be still, be still, be still! Don't make yourself the instrument of man's justice."

"Ehahayaha! Ehoyohoho-o-o . . . wa . . . wa. . . ."

The shouts and the cries pass by, die away, vanish and mingle with the hoarse roar of the gale.

Large beads of sweat fall from my forehead upon my cheeks. Tempest fixes his eyes upon me, the eyes of a

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

poor dumb animal, and with a plaintive whine he gently licks my face with his tongue.

\* \* \* \*

For a week we have been held up by the storm, living side by side in a fraternal intimacy unknown in any other part of the world.

Now that the danger is past, Jessie has resumed her feminine activity. She bustles about in the narrow room, relieving me of all domestic cares. She is the light of my life, and her presence is felt in a thousand household details. My leather jacket has all its buttons, my furs no longer hang like rags, and my otter-skin cap has a lining.

This morning she sets out with a rifle on her shoulder, accompanied by Tempest, who has taken a liking to her. Toward the middle of the day, the dog returns alone. Fearing an accident, I follow him. Two miles away, I find Jessie waiting for me, smoking a cigarette and comfortably seated between the huge antlers of a caribou that she has killed.

"I couldn't drag this big animal, so I sent the dog. We'll lay in a good supply of fresh meat."

Jessie is happy. She laughs with a ringing laughter that displays a set of teeth like those of a young wolf.

\* \* \* \*

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Since we cannot stay here indefinitely, we decide to move on. Jessie harnesses the barking and impatient dogs.

"Are you ready?"

"Just a minute," I answer. "Wait, I'll be with you in a moment."

I go back to the igloo under the deceitful pretext of seeing whether we have forgotten something. There I remain standing and fill my eyes with memories. . . .

No, there is nothing left, nothing but a small heap of cold ashes on the spot where we had our hearth.

\* \* \* \*

Returning from a seal hunt, I do not notice, as usual, at the turn of the road, the light in my hut showing me that a woman is there waiting.

Jessie must be loitering, surely. On the threshold Tempest watches for my arrival. His joy this evening is more exuberant than usual. He jumps upon me and licks my hands.

"Come, be still! Yes, I know you're a good dog, but be still, be still!"

A sensation of cold comes over me as I enter. Brr! Jessie has let the fire go out. I light a lamp, put it on the table, and notice a paper nailed to the wood with a knife. It is a note from Jessie. I read it several times without understanding it. Then the sad, plain reality forces itself upon me.

### THREE MEETINGS WITH JESSIE MARLOWE

Jessie is gone.

What does she tell me? Oh, little enough; she didn't take the trouble to say much.

"Friend, a whaler is about to set sail for Frisco. I am going away. For a long time you will be angry with me; but when you have become calm, you will keep at the bottom of your heart your recollection of me, among the memories that make life livable."

\* \* \* \*

I have done even so. I have dug a hole in my heart, a hole as deep as a grave, and at the bottom I have placed Jessie Marlowe, whom I met three times, only to lose her each time.

Time has scattered its fine dust over my memory, but beneath the gray covering of forgetfulness my widowed thoughts still remember.

On bad winter nights, when the winds come down from the north and beat against my door, I try to gather, one by one, the broken threads of this story; and I could swear that I had dreamed it, had I not before my eyes, hanging on the wall, the slender dagger whose triangular blade fitted so well into a wound in the neck of a certain sergeant of the Canadian Mounted Police.

Jessie Marlowe, you are a reality. I saw you, I knew you. You passed through my life, leaving an indelible stamp upon my heart.

## *THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE*

And in the tumult of my thoughts, more violent than the hurricane of those days, I catch a glimpse of you—you to whom I was nothing and who were nothing to me, you who are to-day wandering somewhere in the world.



## II

### SUPREME WISDOM OR THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS

IF you grow restless on the Yukon and go down again to the coast toward Chilkoot Pass, never go in the direction of the Admiralty Islands. And if, perchance, the demon of travel urges you on, do not cross the Channel, and never enter Baranof Island.

You ask where it is? At the end of the earth. Not at the very end—of course, I am exaggerating—, but near the fifty-seventh degree, north latitude.

On the west side of the island, if your bad luck takes you there, you will discover a city which bears the name of the native Indians, Sitka. The Russians tried their



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

best, when they founded it, to give it the name of Novo-Arkangelsk; but Novo-Arkangelsk was too hard to pronounce, and Sitka was adopted. Sitka is a civilized name. What peculiar people these Russians are!

But that is beside the question. When I say that you discover the city, I mean just what I say. When you come by sea, you notice nothing. Waves and reefs mask the city, and you see on the horizon only Mt. Edgecumbe, standing like a gigantic sentinel, and the western base of the volcano Vestoria.

When you have rounded Japanese Island and followed a long, winding channel, you see in the background Sitka Inlet and the city itself spread out in the shape of an amphitheater.

That is a big word for such a small thing. Picture to yourself an amphitheater of five or six hundred miserable shanties, built of boards nailed together or of spruce logs.

A church that is half minaret and half *izba*, with the houses grouped around it—such is Sitka.

But what do you care about these details? You will never go there, gentlemen, fortunately for you.

As for me, I wanted to have a look. Wearily I roamed through the streets of the town. When I say *streets*, I am speaking figuratively; *saloons* would be a more accurate term.

Now one evening I was leaning upon the wooden

## *SUPREME WISDOM OR THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS*

railing which, from a height of fifteen feet, dominates the large dancing hall of the *Northern*, which, between you and me, is a famous saloon.

At the back was the orchestra, represented by a mechanical organ; to the right was the bar, where reigned supreme Master John Sullivan, a burly brute who, between bumpers, kept yelping: "Come on, boys. Choose your partners—fifty cents a dance." It costs only fifty cents here. At Skagway, at Dyea, or at Dawson, you pay a dollar for a waltz or a polka; but at Sitka there is more merchandise than customers, and the law of supply and demand is in operation. The supply exceeds the demand; therefore, the article drops in price.

The dancing girls of Sitka? Pshaw, they're just like those farther up north—a little more shabby, perhaps, because they are more wretched. God preserve them, just the same!

I don't like to stamp and turn round in one place, even if it costs only fifty cents.

That evening many of the dancing girls were idle, owing to the lack of customers. They were seated, their spangled dresses concealed by large woolen scarfs. Never had a comparison with a sullen herd of cattle seemed to me more strictly accurate.

Meanwhile, some sailors—having come ashore the day before from a San Francisco steamer that brought supplies

## *THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE*

to the whole coast from the Queen Charlotte Islands to St. Paul, or Seal Island—were having a glorious time. The dear fellows were laughing and talking excitedly and making a great noise to prove that they were happy. I am indebted to one of them for renewing my supply of mixture. I hadn't smoked any good tobacco for months. And there I was—thinking of nothing, I must admit—relishing Nicot's weed, whose smoke made bluish rings that faded away, and grew thinner and thinner.

The picture is very clear in my memory. There I stand, while the orchestra rages and the feet of the dancers strike the floor in cadence. There are outbursts of laughter—the shrill laughter of the women and the thick laughter of the men—and above it all the hoarse voice of the host urging his customers to drink.

I feel, or rather divine, the presence of some one brushing against me. It is my friend Hong Cheng Tsee, whom I met at Chinatown, in San Francisco.

My friend Hong Cheng Tsee is a Chinaman who has managed to resist all the decrees and prohibitions of the American Government, which, in order to get rid of the competition of the yellow race, has simply driven out the sons of the Celestial Republic.

How did Hong Cheng Tsee manage to stay? What arrangement did he make with the sheriff? I would not undertake to tell you. All that I know is that the others

*SUPREME WISDOM OR THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS*

have gone, while he is here. He is an alert, keen, and slender old man. Does he wear gold spectacles? What a question! Of course he does, as do all wealthy Chinamen; and, you may take my word for it, Hong Cheng Tsee is a wealthy Chinaman. What does he sell? I confess that I don't know. But I assure you that Hong is a merchant who enjoys the esteem even of the Yankees. If you press me with further questions, I shall tell you that I suspect him of being engaged in usury and in the drug traffic.

I see you laughing. The drug? Wherever there is a Chinaman, it is evident that the drug must exist.

"That doesn't interest you?"

"I'm not wild about it."

"I see you aren't. You mustn't stay here."

"Where could I go to be worse off?"

"To my house, if you wish."

"Oh, in that case. . . ."

Hong glides over the floor; that is his way of walking. I follow him, three paces to the rear.

When the door is opened, the rain beats against our faces.

The Son of Heaven philosophically raises the collar of his overcoat. Though I have on my coat of reindeer skin, I grumble:

"Cursed weather!"

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

As if I were not used to it! I must tell you, since I forgot to do so, that it rains at Sitka 285 days—yes, that's right, you didn't misread it—two hundred and eighty-five days in the year. The statistics are there to prove it, and I don't suppose you are going to deny the statistics.

And to think that, to the north, one sees the top of a mountain that is called Mt. Fairweather! The explorers must have wished to play a joke on us.

It is raining in torrents. Hong Cheng Tsee hops along; while my heavy boots sink into the liquid mud, and I swear by all the demons of Hell. Hong is now walking near me. In a rut I lose my footing. With a grip that one would not have suspected in a man of his age, Hong raises me to my feet.

From the cone of Mt. Vestoria rise tongues of flame. The volcano would be a picturesque sight if one had time to look at it, or rather if the weather were more agreeable.

I continue to curse. Why the Devil did I listen to this old fool? Wasn't I happy in the saloon? I was warm and I had a pipe. Ah, men are never satisfied with their lot.

"This is the place," says my friend.

Well! The house seems comfortable and inviting. My face brightens, and I become less grouchy.

"Step inside."

## *SUPREME WISDOM OR THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS*

The old man stands aside, and I enter his dwelling. The door is carefully closed after us, and two servants hurry forward. Hong Cheng Tsee gives orders in his native tongue and offers excuses for doing so.

The servants make haste and turn on the electric lights, which are softly veiled by many-colored lanterns. Now they stand there before me. One of them deftly removes my muddy boots. The other takes off my leather coat and puts on me a gown with loose and soft sleeves. Only the Chinese know how to dress with perfect comfort.

I laugh to see myself thus attired. It really must be comical, for Hong Cheng Tsee makes wrinkles around his almond eyes, which is his way of smiling.

The servants have disappeared. Hong invites me to take a seat beside him on the bright silk cushions. He claps his hands, and a Chinese doll appears. How did she get in? That's a mystery.

Tea and pipes—that's what the master must have ordered, for the doll goes out and returns immediately, bringing these things.

The little flame sputters. The doll remains. In her crouching position, she looks very much like a mechanical toy. With a deft hand she prepares the pill and cooks it over the low flame. . . . She holds out the first pipe.

Hong politely renews his excuses. He gives me tea, since he never has any alcohol. As for opium, he does



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

not offer me any. He probably considers me unworthy to penetrate into the mysteries of the sacred ring. In reality, I prefer it that way. I take out my clay pipe and, with Hong's permission, I smoke. . . .

\* \* \* \*

How many hours have I been here? I do not know. My mind is a blank. I have not been thinking of anything, and Hong Cheng Tsee has respected what he believes to be my reverie.

But at last I grow weary. I have been smoking like the funnel of a steamer. My mouth is clammy, my throat irritated, and I am coughing. Deferentially, Hong stops smoking, lays down the bamboo, and inquires after my health.

Lord, how funny he is, this animated, grotesque image who, in the most abominable country in the world, has succeeded in escaping from human contingencies and living his dream!

With stupor, my eyes behold this subtle product of civilization. He fathoms all my thoughts. It is surprising how this devilish man reads in me. That embarrasses me. I close my eyes.

Then Hong Cheng Tsee speaks:

"Leave your eyelids open, my son. As long as Buddha commands us to live, let us not veil the beauty of our

## *SUPREME WISDOM OR THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS*

gaze. Within us, everything grows old as the hours pass—our hearts, our bodies especially, our faces, our mouths relaxing like an unstrung bow, our chins hollow with emaciation or flabby with fat, our ears shriveling like old burnt rubbish, our wrinkled hands, our knotted fingers. Only our eyes never grow old.

“These things seem to you quite simple; and yet, you have never before given thought to them. Why? Because you belong to a race that does not observe.

“Your men, who think themselves the foremost among men, are mere children; your scholars are still on the first chapter of the book of knowledge; your men of letters are bunglers who handle the quill with an unskilled hand; and as for your artists, what durable monuments have they raised? Your Venus of Milo is a robust female, and your Parthenon is not worth one of the pillars of Angkor.

“You are skilled in the art of deception. For one Chinese word you have ten decrees signed with the flourish of the scribes, and yet a single word of a Chinaman is more reliable.

“You are a childish people, and every one knows that childhood has bad tendencies. We were wrong to teach you the art of making noise with powder. Like young rascals, you used it to kill one another. And as for all that Buddha inspired in you to make you happy, you have

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

turned it away from its source and directed it toward Death.

"You carry within you every germ of destruction, you children who will never grow up to be men."

As he speaks, his thin voice cuts with the hard and sharp edge of steel. Smoke rises from the bronze crucible. The doll is still crouching, sacerdotal in her attitude, her face a sealed book.

And my gaze falls upon a little porcelain group, a strange group that I do not see very distinctly.

Hong Cheng Tsee divines my preoccupation. He gives an order, and the doll holds out the statuette. It represents three monkeys seated. One of them, the one at the left, has his paws over his mouth; the one in the middle holds them before his eyes; the one at the right stops his ears with his tiny fists.

"Does that perplex you? Know then, that this is the secret of the happiness of our race. In our eyes this group represents supreme wisdom:

Say nothing,  
See nothing,  
Hear nothing."

The Chinese doll has taken from my fingers the fragile porcelain group, and has put it back in its place. The little beasts are there, making their unchanging and con-

*SUPREME WISDOM OR THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS*

secreated gestures. The one that hears not and the one that speaks not seem to be looking at me impertinently.

Supreme wisdom? Nonsense! And I search my mind for an argument that will refute the testimony that my friend Hong Cheng Tsee will not fail to use in support of his thesis. I find nothing, and my host resumes his silent smoking.

At the sixtieth pipe, understanding my thought and answering it, Hong Cheng Tsee languidly raises his head and says:

"The proof that we possess supreme wisdom? I shall give you just one example, if you wish."

"I am waiting."

And Hong Cheng Tsee adds placidly:

"The proof is that we had discovered America long before Christopher Columbus; only we were careful not to tell it."

And the head of Hong Cheng Tsee sinks again, making a white patch on the bright silk of the cushions.



### III

#### KOTAK, THE INNUIT ESKIMO, ASKS A FEW QUESTIONS

"You must admit that you live in a queer country.

"You claim to be a free man—white men are so conceited that they always believe themselves foremost among mankind—, and yet, you are forbidden to do this and you are forbidden to do that. What is there left for you to do? Nothing.

"You like to complicate your existence. Why? You have sheriffs and policemen. Why?"

The reasoning of primitive men is like that of children. Its logic is merciless, and I must confess that I was very much at a loss to find an answer for my friend Kotak, who asked me these questions while notching a walrus tusk with his knife.

This conversation took place among the Innuvit Eskimos

## KOTAK ASKS A FEW QUESTIONS

encamped at the end of the point that America sends out into the Arctic Ocean and which the geographers have named Point Barrow.

On the ground around us lay the bristling skeletons of whales, bearing a faint resemblance to the hulls of freighters under construction. It is here that the natives load the boats.

I am sharpening the point of a harpoon and pretending to be completely absorbed in my work in order not to have to answer.

But Kotak is obstinate.

"I'd like to know that country of yours. Judging by what I've seen at Dawson. . . ."

I interrupt him brusquely.

"What! Do you know Dawson?"

"Sure! I went up the Yukon with the white-face-who-sold-prayers; and if your country is like Dawson, I don't think much of it.

"There are more orders and regulations posted in the sheriff's office than Tunya, the spirit that lives in the earth, water, and sky, ever issued for the happiness of mankind.

"Why work all day in the rough excavations of the mine, to throw away, in a few moments, and with one cast of the dice, the yellow stone so painfully acquired? Why?

"Why drink when you are not thirsty? Tell me."



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

It is astonishing how the sharpening of my steel point absorbs me more and more.

But Kotak goes on:

"The white-man-who-sold-prayers used to scold me whenever he saw me polishing my ivory stick that serves to drive away the witchcraft of Kiolya, Spirit of the Northern Lights. On the other hand, he wanted me to kiss the double stick of wood to which is fastened the pale-face-who-is-being-tortured. Why?"

"Kotak, you get on my nerves."

"Don't get angry. And tell me, why do you lock up in prisons the little children whose parents have been taken away by the Spirits, instead of intrusting them to the richest families, as is done among us?"

"Why do you fight to move the stone that limits your domain? The whole earth is ours, and the sea also. Everything belongs to every one, save the kayak, which is our own, since we have hollowed it with our own hands.

"The women of Dawson dance, take strong drinks, and smoke tobacco. You despise them. Our women prepare our weapons, and they have the same rights as we. Without them no great hunt is decided upon, and they accompany us in our adventures.

"And your own wife, where is she?"

This direct question leaves me speechless. I confess that I had not foreseen the situation in which I should

## KOTAK ASKS A FEW QUESTIONS

be asked why I had not brought a woman to see what was going on at Point Barrow about the year 1916, with the thermometer registering thirty-eight degrees below zero.

Kotak, pitiless and triumphant, goes on:

"And the old people, what do you do with them?"

My companion would be very much surprised if I told him that in my country, where competence requires senility, the old men occupy the highest places, defending *unguibus et rostro* the stipends that they have acquired, and that it is they who preside over the destinies of the State and set the fashion in politics, or, without going so far, in literature.

I am careful not to say these things that would put to rout the simple mind of Kotak, the Innuited Eskimo, who lives in the farthest habitable regions of the earth.

Calmly, Kotak adds:

"Among us, the old people are eaten."

This time I can stand it no longer. I intervene and berate him soundly. I try to make him understand all the horror of his conduct. But Kotak is not moved by such a small matter, and gives me the following explanation:

"The good fishing trips and the lucky hunting seasons are followed by periods of famine. Then all useless mouths are suppressed. It is the old people themselves who ask to die.

"We're not barbarians; we don't let them see Death

## *THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE*

face to face. Some day, when they are not suspecting it, we poison them. Then we cut their throats and give them to our dogs as food."

"To your dogs?"

"Sure! And then we eat the dogs."

That day I didn't carry the conversation any farther.



#### IV

### SEAL CITY

BETWEEN the one hundred sixty-ninth and the one hundred seventy-first degrees of longitude west of Greenwich, lies an island which, on the map, looks like a plucked hen running away. It is Saint Paul, the island of the seals.

This hen has three chicks: Saint George to the southeast, Walrus Island to the east, and Otter Island to the southwest. All four are known to navigators and geographers by the name of Pribilof Islands, but the Aleut Eskimos call them by the simpler name Atik.

Saint Paul, the plucked hen, is a rocky island strewn with cones and craters. It is very probable that it would have remained unknown, if one day the seals had not taken it into their heads to choose it for their domain.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Alas! Rudyard Kipling has told us, in a humorous vein, the beautiful story of the White Seal, a story which was related to him, he says, by Limmershin the Winter Wren. And Kipling has shown us that wherever there were seals, men sprang up, skilled in tracking them.

It is true that Kotik, the White Seal, discovers, at the end of the adventure, the blessed land to which hunters never come. Happy Kotik!

But I cannot believe in so much happiness for Mr. Seal; and in my day all of his kind had not forsaken the shores of Saint Paul Island, to go and seek their fortune in Sea Cow's ideal meadows. There they were in thousands, covering the beach.

After Monsieur de Buffon, the naturalist with lace cuffs, after the Honorable Monsieur Cuvier, and after the great English poet to whom the book of the sea is as familiar as the book of the jungle, shall I dare to sing the heroic combats of the male seals for the possession of thirty square yards of land, and the Homeric battles for—how shall I say it?—for their personal use of the eight to fifteen lady seals of their hearts?

Never has the law of might asserted itself in nature with greater rigor.

Ever since Mr. Seal has been roaming about in the empire of the seas, there has recurred at a fixed date this same determination to conquer. The seals arrive during

## SEAL CITY

the first days of June, preceded by the old bull, whose fur is iron-gray. One sees them advance with their broad snouts and heavy mustaches sticking out of the water. They storm the shore, and, as their hind flippers are turned backward, they cannot raise themselves, but advance with a succession of jumps in which the muscles of the trunk play the principal rôle.

Making use of their front flippers as much as possible, they seek out the best place. A place, in order to be acceptable, must combine the triple advantage of being near the shore, sheltered from the wind, and exposed to the sun.

But alas, the place does not belong to the first occupant. It really belongs to the one that knows how to make it respected.

Biting, scratching, and crushing their adversaries under their weight, the strong confirm their conquests. And the number of scars that seam certain skins bears sufficient witness to the fury of these skirmishes.

When the house is in order, there is nothing left to do but to wait for the hostess. She comes a few days later.

Seal City has a watchful guardian who, perched on a height, announces the approach of danger and all memorable events. The arrival of the ladies is a memorable event.

With a guttural cry between the bellowing and the in-



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

take of a pipe organ, the watchman announces that these ladies are in sight.

Straightway the bulls take to the sea. Making their most graceful dives, essaying their most skillful aquatic frolics—roaring, bellowing, spouting water, and blowing—they entertain them with a thousand graces and a thousand tricks.

It is a noisy wedding procession that makes its way toward the beach where the wives are chosen.

Some of them, possessing insatiable appetites, form harems. Certain bulls have been known to treat themselves to as many as fifteen females.

But after the wedding, good-by tranquillity. Mr. Seal is jealous, furious, suspicious. He watches over his property with such attention that he leaves his rookery no more. For two or three months, as long as the good season lasts, the old male will not forsake his post again, refraining from roaming the sea, and forgetting to eat. Large and fat on his arrival in June, he goes away in autumn reduced to his simplest dimensions, having lost sometimes as much as four hundred pounds.

Woe to the bachelor who prowls around the harem! He pays for it, if not with his life, at least with a good drubbing. Limping, the presumptuous youngster returns to his allotted place.

Unable to win, the weaklings—those inadequately

## SEAL CITY

armed for the struggle—are reduced to celibacy. They are driven back by their fellows far into the interior, to the poorly sheltered spots that the sun never reaches and where the cold winds from the north blow with the fury of a tempest.

Not producing, and especially not reproducing, they are the ones that are doomed to die; for man's decrees are merciless, and the bachelors alone are struck down and destroyed. The makers of statistics affirm that more than three million seals are struck down every year by the clubs of the hunters.

Poor bachelors!

What a moral lesson these seals give to man!

But let us leave these considerations and return to the lady seals, who have been unmoved spectators of the battles of their lords and masters.

Shortly after her arrival, Madam Seal gives birth to her offspring—usually only one youngster, who comes into the world covered with a woolly down. There are hundreds of species. The learned zoölogists will tell you in Latin their name, genus, family, substitutes and imitations, etc.

Baby Seal is a wide-awake fellow, who sometimes takes to the sea a few hours after his birth. But these are precocious specimens, comparable to those little brats who play the violin at the age of three. In reasonable families,

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Master Seal waits until he has lost his woolly coat, which requires about two weeks.

All the baby seals declare that the day when they lose their "padding" is not a gay time for them. Madam Seal comes along and drags her progeny into the waves by force—yes, gentlemen, by force. Bleatings and sighs are of no avail. Mamma is merciless. In with him, in with him! Splash! She throws in her little one, who paddles and paddles in the salt water.

If the adventure is unsuccessful, Madam Seal, with a stroke of her tail, takes the imprudent youngster back to the shore. But no matter how unintelligent he may be, Master Seal manages to go through with it, and in a short time becomes an expert swimmer. Thenceforward he has a new playground for frolicking with his comrades.

\* \* \* \*

On Saint Paul's Island—Seal City—there are sections, squares, and streets, where each one quietly goes about, minding his own business, and where each one enjoys the most complete liberty—a liberty which conforms to the best conceived definition of the word, and which consists in doing whatever you wish, on condition that you do not disturb your neighbor.

But there animals are in control, not men.

\* \* \* \*

## SEAL CITY

And when the season is over, when the first mists of autumn enshroud the lofty cliffs of Saint George and the volcanic cones of Saint Paul, Mr. Seal, followed by his wives and babies, sets out toward the southern seas.

Thousands of bachelors—as they are called by the English sailors—who in previous years have roamed in freedom over the free seas, will return no more. No more will they pursue the halibut and the salmon, no more will they romp with snorts and puffs on the crest of the waves, and no more will they open their flippers and let themselves be carried along by the currents.

Alas! For weeks their remains have been drying on the frames of the killing pens. Their skins, shorn with a razor and stripped of the hairs that lie stiff and flat, retain only the brown padding which, in the hands of the manufacturers of Paris or London, will become "sea otter" for the shoulders of our elegant ladies.

Poor skinned bachelors! Your flesh, which is anything but savory, has delighted some of my Aleut or Inuit friends; and your fat, boiled down and melted, has been given to the traders in exchange for a few dollars or, more often, for a few gallons of whisky.

Everything that comes from you—the most inoffensive, and perhaps the wisest, of all animals—is used as an article of trade—even your teeth, which may be bought for ten cents apiece in the stores of Seattle and Vancouver.

## *THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE*

Think of roaming the Pacific from Juan Fernandez Island to the Pribilof Archipelago and becoming at last a watch fob on the tense belly of some self-satisfied citizen! What a sad fate! Truly, it takes a man to think of such things.



V

THE UTILITY OF UMBRELLAS AMONG THE THLINKITS

NOISELESSLY the door swings open, and Kotak's flat face appears. Cautiously he comes in, then notices my presence. His countenance beams with a broad smile that shows his shining teeth; while his short, flat nose seems to grow still broader, and around his eyes are formed wrinkles in the shape of birds' feet.

Kotak makes his most graceful bows, and rubs alternately his right ear and his left nostril, which is his way of being polite. When these courtesies are over, unceremoniously he sits down near me on the camp bed, where I am lying with all my clothes on.



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

With his forefinger Kotak scratches his head, then smooths his thick, stiff, and glossy black hair. Evidently he has important things to tell me.

I ask him for news of his wife, his father, his grandfather, and his three children. Every one is in the best of health. Then is there anything the matter with the dogs? No, the team is taking a rest. Doll, who had broken her leg on the tundra, has recovered; and Kaa-ka no longer has the colic that used to make him roll on the snow, howling with pain.

Not until then do I notice how my friend Kotak is dressed. He is wearing his double jacket of sealskin, whose outer thickness has a hood. His breeches, also of sealskin, are fastened with leather thongs. He has put on his top-boots, whose soles are made of walrus skin, and his gloves of caribou hide hang at his belt.

"Are you going on an expedition?"

"Yes."

"Well, good luck to you in your hunting, Kotak. Take along this flask of whisky."

Kotak pockets the whisky, but doesn't move an inch. Suddenly he makes up his mind.

"You're going to come with me."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"On a hunting trip?"

## UTILITY OF UMBRELLAS AMONG THE THLINKITS

"On a hunting trip. I have just learned that an important herd of seals is on the move. I am going out to sea, and you are going with me."

I am about to protest. Kotak now speaks with extraordinary volubility.

"You can't refuse. In the first place, you'll find it interesting. It's fun to hunt the seal, and then. . . ."

"And then what?"

"And then you can't stay alone forever. Tunya, who lives in the ground, has got into your head during your sleep; but the Raven, who protects us, will drive Tunya away. He is all-powerful. He is our Father. He stole the fish from our Grandfather, the Great Bear, in order to give it to the Thlinkits. He will offer Tunya presents, and Tunya will flee to his underground abode."

Since all the Eskimo gods have a hand in it, there is nothing for me to do but to obey.

I go to get my Winchester, but Kotak stops me.

"No, no! Not that thing!"

"To go hunting, we need a gun."

"No use."

And Kotak explains to me that shooting frightens the seals, who are so timid that they stay away five or six years without reappearing in the regions where they have heard it.

We go out, and Kotak shows me his weapons—javelins,

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

harpoons, and spears. These, he assures me, are the weapons that were given to the Eskimos by Klooch, the Grand Master of the Mountain Tops, in the days when man spoke like a dog.

On the shore, men have gathered and are preparing bait, shining their knives, or scraping skins with ivory scrapers.

There are women also, dressed exactly like the men, save that their hood is broader. It is there that the last baby is sheltered, carefully tied up in a leather sheath, so that one sees only the copper-colored face and the tender blue eyes peering out in astonishment.

Kotak drags onto the beach his own kayak, then the kayak that Tohui has been kind enough to place at my disposal while he is hunting the *bald face*, or terrible white bear.

To be sure, the civilization of the Eskimo has always surprised me; but where it appears really to have reached a degree of refinement is in the construction of these fragile skiffs. They are made of skins stretched upon a framework of birch, five or six yards long and five feet wide. A cockpit is made in the middle, and there the paddler places himself. He draws toward him one of the skins and fastens it. Then the canoe becomes unsinkable. The man and the boat form a single unit. If it overturns, a stroke of the paddle rights it. It is a masterpiece of precision and ingenuity.

## UTILITY OF UMBRELLAS AMONG THE THLINKITS

Kotak sees that I am properly seated. He buckles the straps himself, gives me the single paddle, then in turn takes his place. At the bow are his weapons, and at the stern is a bladder tied to a harpoon by means of a long rope. This will serve to reveal the whereabouts of the seal after it has been harpooned.

The women wish us good luck and smile with a smile that is accentuated by the *tatus*, or tiny buttons of bone or ivory, which they place laterally beneath the commissures of the lips. Their tattooed chins have from five to ten parallel stripes, according to the tribe to which they belong.

But Kotak avails himself of the presence of spectators to make a hit for himself. He turns his skiff, rocks it, disappears, remains with his keel in the air for a considerable time, then reappears.

He reminds you of a sea god playing upon the waters.

When he deems that he has aroused enough admiration, he gives a little whistle and rushes straight for the open sea.

I strive to follow him as best I can. The kayak literally flies over the crest of the waves; and soon, on turning round, I see the blurred outline of Point Barrow fading away into the fantastic confusion of whale skeletons showing chalk white against the bluish snow.

\* \* \* \*

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Kotak has just prepared a dish of his own, in which the blood and the fat of seals play an important part.

The hunt has been successful. We have four harpooned males that we have dragged here before returning to Point Barrow.

We are in a depression on a little island, where nest myriads of birds of glittering plumage. But the admirable thing about the place is the order and the harmony that reign there.

Each species has its own definite domain. The gulls with peach-colored feathers occupy the summit of the cliff. Farther down, at the next level, where the terraced rocks overhang the sea, the big orange-colored gulls waddle upon their pink legs. In the cavities there are millions of unknown birds, bearing on their wings all the emeralds of the ocean and all the azure of the sky.

The sea is calm and of an intense green. The distant horizon is inclosed in a bluish background, against which is outlined the jagged mass of an iceberg, drawn along irresistibly by the submarine currents.

And Kotak, very proud to display his knowledge, avails himself of the opportunity to give me a lecture on seals. To be sure, he expresses himself with less elegance than Monsieur de Buffon, but Monsieur de Buffon would have learned much by listening to him.

He tells me about the buff-colored seal and about the

## *UTILITY OF UMBRELLAS AMONG THE THLINKITS*

seal whose upper lip is grooved and whose front flippers have only four digits.

He speaks of the long-necked seal that comes nobody knows whence and has no claws at all, of the old seals with skin striped like that of a tiger, and of the young ones with black back and white belly.

He mentions the seal that is as large as an ox and that is sometimes seen, but never harpooned, though certain hunters have pursued it for a hundred and fifty miles. It always disappears when about to be taken, being protected by the spirits of the waters.

There are some that have the head of a tortoise, while others, displaying more fanciful colors, are of a blackish shade and wear a yellow design on their sides.

There are thousands and thousands of the speckled and spotted ones. One species has well defined circles on its back.

Some are bearded, and others have mustaches. Then there are the otaries, with bleary eyes and soft fur, or fur that is rough and coarse. Some are black, and others are of an ashen gray. One coquettish species is adorned with a russet band under its belly, while another wears it on its head like a scarf.

Some are yellow and have long ears; others, to be different, have ears that turn down. Some are found with no claws; others have three, four, or five.



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Kotak has an accuracy of detail that would be envied by the Director of the Museum of Natural History in Paris. He explains to me why the seals, having their hind limbs turned backward, are unable to stand up and are obliged to bounce upon the ground like a ball.

He knows that the ordinary seal has thirty-five teeth, eighteen above and seventeen below, and that most of them have five fully developed claws joined together by an interdigital membrane.

He has seen some that were three yards long and weighed eight hundred pounds; but most of them measure a yard and a half and have half that weight.

I cannot help thinking of all the hecatombs that take place at the expense of the unfortunate seals!

Poor seals, unaware of men's wickedness! What a frightful thing is your death! Whoever has not heard your cries and your heart-rending calls does not know how far suffering can go.

They strike you down, they knock you on the head, they cut your throats, they hack you to pieces, while the blood runs in streams. And soon the snow disappears, to make way for a liquid mud with an unpleasant, sickening odor.

\* \* \* \*

But Kotak, whose practical mind is unhampered by sentimentality, says to me:

## *UTILITY OF UMBRELLAS AMONG THE THLINKITS*

"In this place we have had easy prey; but do you know what it is to remain for hours on an ice field, watching the hole where the seal is sure to come to breathe? You crouch upon the ice, your eyes fixed and your hand gripping the harpoon. The cold penetrates your bones; your mind wavers and becomes muddled. One single thought remains: 'If the hunt is unsuccessful, the tribe will not eat.' For us the seal means life, our life and that of our dogs. That is why the tribes that are far from the coast make long expeditions to procure a reserve supply.

"Our brothers, the Thlinkits, capture animals alive. It's a queer kind of hunting. They take position in a line curved like an arc of a circle, between the seals and the sea, and they frighten them with great shouts. The arc closes, little by little, as they drive the seals in the desired direction. To reach their goal, the hunters make use of a strange weapon imported by your brothers, namely, umbrellas."

"Umbrellas?"

"Yes, umbrellas. They are really very convenient, these umbrellas bartered by the fishermen and the trappers—big red and blue umbrellas which they open and close with a racket. The animals bounce about in terror, and fall down breathless. The play of the umbrellas begins again, and thus it continues until the animals are brought to a

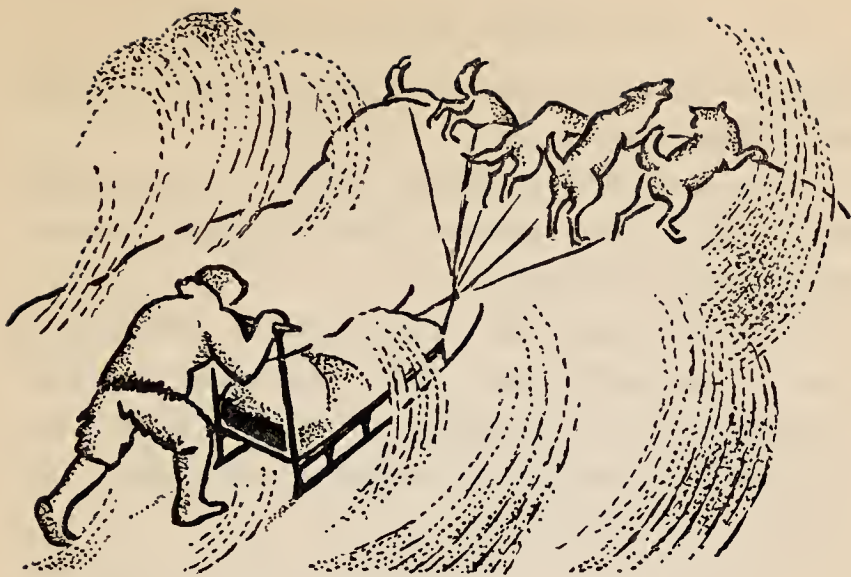
## *THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE*

place favorable for the slaughter. Sometimes the hunt lasts twenty days."

I remain dumbfounded at the unexpected utilization of the old "gamps" of our fathers by the Eskimos of Alaska. And, as always in the most pathetic situations, there is a comical note. It is this comical note that I remember and that makes me smile. I am still smiling when Kotak says to me:

"Let us not loiter. The night is about to devour the day. If you wish, we shall return, little brother, we and our game."

So we come back to Point Barrow, the last port in the world in the polar region, or the first, depending on where you are and where you are coming from.



## VI

### ON THE TRAIL

SUDDENLY the trail—the long white track on which the sled glides—disappears; and, to complete my misfortune, a snowstorm descends upon me.

Bravely my dogs face it. My team is hitched in Indian fashion, the leader in front and the others spread out like a fan. The beasts tug at their harness, burying their hard claws in the frozen snow. Their hind legs strain, and their noses search the trail.

If I remember rightly, beyond that hill I shall find the mail trail again. With my voice I encourage the dogs: "Mush, mush on, boys!" My seven Labradors redouble

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

their efforts, and my sled passes swiftly onward. A lunge, and at last we are at the top of the hill.

Up here the storm is raging. My dogs are maddened by the blinding snow; and we shoot down the slope as if driven by the hurricane.

The team plunges into a choked ravine. The abyss is there, seven hundred feet away. The fan closes, as instinctively the dogs turn aside. I have just time to catch a glimpse of the chasm, into which the wind rushes with a roar.

No sign of the trail. Nothing but snow for miles and miles.

When night has fallen, the thermometer registers forty below zero.

On we go.

For two days we have lost the trail, and we are wandering and camping at random. Ten times I thought I had found my way again, and ten times I realized that it was my own tracks that I was following.

We have been moving in a circle. The dogs are exhausted; they scarcely respond to my call.

My compass is out of order, and I have lost all sense of direction. Sometimes the weary dogs come to a stop. In spite of my reluctance, I am obliged to use my whip of reindeer hide that is thrown like a lasso.

My supply of corn meal is exhausted. I have nothing

## ON THE TRAIL

left but a handful of tea and some salt in a wooden horn.

Fortunately, the storm has abated. Big white clouds are scudding across the sky, and the plain stretches out to infinity, hemmed with pink mauve where it meets the horizon.

Dwarfed spruce trees hold out their branches.

An oppressing fatigue weighs down my eyelids. I shake off my drowsiness. If I stop, I shall fall asleep; and if sleep comes over me, it means death.

"Come on, boys! Eho Eho-o-o!"

Aroused by my voice and whip, the dogs put forth a supreme effort.

All at once Tempest, the leader, barks. Why this joy? My eyes look about; I see nothing.

But Tempest has seen something, and his comrades have understood. The sled glides forward on its brass runners. I slacken the reins and let the dogs go. Swinging to the right, they pull hard and snap their jaws. The barking of the leader has given way to a steady growl that sounds like coarse laughter. And suddenly I too see it. Yonder, a thin gray streak. . . . It's the trail; we are saved.

\* \* \* \*

For three miles we have been running along the mail trail, and the dogs seem to have forgotten their fatigue.



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

But night is about to fall; and when the excitement has subsided, what will become of us?

The god of the *coureurs de bois* is protecting us. The dogs yelp all together, and come to a stop in front of a hut of spruce logs.

Without knocking, I push the door open and shout my pleasantest "Hello!" But no word of welcome greets me, as is customary. I enter and find the dwelling empty. I make free use of it, in accordance with the law established by the rough men of the North. With my flint and steel I strike a light. Searching the chests, I find some food for my dogs, who receive it with evident satisfaction. As for me, I fall into a brutish sleep, my head buried in the gray fox skins.

\* \* \* \*

When I awaken, it is broad daylight, and the snow is sparkling in the pale sunshine. I sit up. With my fists I rub my eyes, and with a prolonged yawn I stretch my arms. But my gesture is cut short. I have just spied an engraving nailed above the door and representing the *Angelus* of Millet.

To be sure, the chromo is frightful; but I was so far from expecting to find here that picture recalling my distant homeland that I remain for a moment as if dazed.

Tenderly I gaze upon that peasant and that peasant

## ON THE TRAIL

woman of France with heads bowed toward the earth, the giver of harvests; and I forget that I am thousands of leagues away, in a rugged land that stubbornly defends the miserable metal concealed in its flanks. To be sure, this is the "land of the pay dirt," and a thousand particles of yellow gold are sparkling in the bottom of the pan; but how much less beautiful, and how much less luminous, than the haystack that stands there, gilded by the setting sun!

\* \* \* \*

Two days later I was among the Yankees, at Eagle, in Alaska, with my friend Jim MacCarter—a fine chap, by the way. He took me along with him on a moose hunt, so that I completely forgot to ask him whether he knew the name of the fellow who had brought Millet's *Angelus* to the farthest frontiers of the world.



## VII

### THE MAN WITH THE TOP HAT

"YOU'RE young, partner," says Gregory Land, who is making corn fritters in the very pan that I use to sift the gold-bearing sands; "you're young, and you don't know the country very well.

"Trust the long experience of an old bird who has been on the trail for fourteen years. Yes, sir; for fourteen years I've been running along the trail behind my dogs, delivering letters and newspapers over the whole Yukon Territory. And for what a salary! Damned Government!"

And Gregory Land interrupts himself to send a squirt

## THE MAN WITH THE TOP HAT

of brownish saliva over the fritters into the hot ashes; for Gregory has the honorable habit of chewing tobacco.

I feel that I must interrupt him:

"You are the man that gets the warmest welcome. As soon as the bells of your dogs are heard jingling on the trail, joy comes to the men's hearts. You are the one they are waiting for. You are pampered, you are entertained."

"I know, I know; but I have no illusions. They aren't waiting for me, but for what I'm bringing them."

"That's the same thing."

"Another of your faults, my boy. If you want to live in this country, you'll have to get rid of a lot of that sentimentality. Sentiment here. . . ."

Gregory laughs with a laugh that shakes him, and avails himself of this pause in the conversation to toss up the fritters.

When the pan is back in its place, he goes on:

"Here you need a heart that is firmly fastened in a good old frame that is proof against anything, will power, strength, or, if you haven't that, skill.

"Look at me. I was cut out for another life. I studied at the University of California, in Berkeley, and I even have diplomas written in Latin, with my name in round letters in the middle.

"Why didn't I stay in my town, where I would have

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

become a lawyer, with just as good a reputation as any other? Why didn't I? Because civilized people disgust me.

"I went away one morning to try my luck. I gambled and lost the little that I had torn from the earth, and this cured me of mining. Afterwards, I was a lumberjack, a mason, and a bartender; and then, since I knew how to drive a team properly, the Canadian Government was kind enough to accept me as a mail carrier. That was fourteen years ago. Excuse me, partner; I am repeating myself. That's a bad sign."

Gregory Land sighs and bewails his lot:

"Ah, it's no longer like the good old times—it's never like the good old times when you're getting old; so we naturally find that the days of our youth were the best. All the same, it used to be better here in the old days."

To cheer him up, I pour him a glassful of whisky. Gregory throws back his head and swallows it in one draught.

"You're a likable chap," he says by way of thanks.

Then he adds:

"There are some fritters that you won't forget."

He offers me a golden, crisp one, on the end of his knife.

I praise his culinary talents. He accepts the compliment without modesty and resumes his speech.

He is a real encyclopedia, this man who follows the

## THE MAN WITH THE TOP HAT

trail. He cites facts and dates, and adorns his speech with a series of anecdotes, serious or amusing.

That is the way Gregory Land pays for the hospitality that he receives when he and his dogs are surprised by the night, which comes down, in these polar regions, like a falling curtain.

The mail carrier continues while I eat. He declares himself satisfied with the bottle of whisky and the tobacco pouch that I have placed at his disposal.

"If I remember rightly, the Territory of Alaska, including the islands, cannot fall short of 590,000 square miles, that is to say, almost three times the area of your France. From the mouth of the Simpson to the southern point of Prince of Wales Island, from Mt. St. Elias to the Arctic Ocean, following the meridian of 143 degrees and 20 minutes west of your meridian—over this area of 590,000 square miles there are to-day some thirty or thirty-five thousand of you miners, or men who get their living from the mines, grouped together in the Valley of the Yukon, or in the vicinity of the Tanana, the Stewart, or the Porcupine.

"You are, as you should be, a jolly lot, having come from the four corners of the earth to take your chance.

"I know almost all of you, or, in any case, you all know me. Oh, I've met a lot of them, and I've seen a lot—Americans from the West who had found the pay unsat-



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

isfactory in the region of the Sacramento and in Nevada; French Canadians from Alberta or Saskatchewan; also Europeans who—pardon the expression—had trailed through the filth of every dive and tried every trade—Englishmen, Scotchmen, Irishmen, Germans, Austrians, Frenchmen, and sometimes Spaniards and Italians, who had little resistance against the rigors of the climate.

"I understand. It's a rough trade; for it no longer suffices, as in the old days, to pass the gold-bearing deposits through a sieve, or to tear from the very rock, without much labor or difficulty, the quartz that conceals the yellow stone.

"The creeks have long since been abandoned, since they yield not one cent's worth of pay dirt. The miners have given up, or have gone farther north, where life is harder and where the soil defends its secret better.

"Do you know, my boy, that on the Porcupine a gang of miners had to break through nine yards of frost before reaching workable earth? Those who, like me, set out at random, with a pick on their shoulder, have little assurance of success. The old Yukoners find no longer a single ounce of gold when left to their own resources.

"Ah! The mines of to-day! A man must be several times a millionaire to be a miner. And there must be prospectors, electrical machinery, derricks, steam shovels, stone crushers—a tremendous amount of equipment, which they have to bring over infernally difficult trails.

## THE MAN WITH THE TOP HAT

"Being a miner to-day is like being a convict. The old independent miner of former days used to come and go like a prairie wolf; now he is as domestic as a city dog. He obeys a foreman, who obeys the engineer, who in turn represents the financiers of the civilized cities. He is one cell within the organism; that's all."

With a movement of his tongue, Gregory shifts his chew from his right cheek to his left cheek.

"But these are philosophical considerations which will not change the situation in the least. The thing worth knowing—and the only thing—is that the fifteen white men who carried on the fur trade in the Yukon Basin about the year 1890 have now increased to thousands. Now I declare and maintain that the thousands are slaves and that the fifteen alone were free men."

It is astonishing how talkative my friend Gregory becomes under the influence of whisky. In proportion as drunkenness invades his brain, his mind becomes clearer and more mathematical. But in order not to offend me, he becomes gentle again.

"After all, you fellows are all right. But to say that you have nothing for which to reproach yourselves would be an exaggeration. I know some [he says this with a wrinkling of his left eyelid]—I know several who are at odds with the courts in their own country and in neighboring countries. And they aren't the worst of the bunch either.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"Many are honest fellows, craving for a life of adventure, and attracted by the Northland, devourer of men, as though by a mistress. Don't you think, Freddy, my friend, that volumes might be written on the psychology of those people who left everything, to try their luck at the farthest limits of the world?"

"Learned doctors would find there enough material for dissecting the soul of man, but—very fortunately for us—the doctors remain shivering and wrapped in their dressing gowns—crotchety, coughing, and peevish, in the seclusion of their comfortable studies."

I know of no one who is more talkative than a lonely man. Gregory Land, who spends days and days alone with his dogs, talks of and about everything. He jumps from one idea to another, as a bird from perch to perch.

With hands crossed over his chest and legs stretched out on the floor, he speaks to himself, rather than to me.

From time to time he stops, takes a swallow of alcohol, and resumes his talking, pursuing his dream aloud.

All at once he doubles up so quickly that he looks like a broken marionette.

For a moment he collects his thoughts, blissfully chewing his quid. I respect his silence, but it is of short duration.

Soon he resumes, in the familiar tone that is dear to him:

## THE MAN WITH THE TOP HAT

"I have certainly met some queer birds in the fourteen years that I've been running from Skagway to Port Clarence, by way of Dawson and Rupert City. But the most interesting, to tell the truth, is one of your own fellow countrymen. He is a recluse who wasn't willing to comply with the requirements of the big companies. He has a creek thirty-five miles from here, a creek that is all his own, with a clear title to the property. Promises, money—nothing has tempted him. He is more obstinate than the rock from which he wrests, laboriously and with improvised equipment, a few ounces of gold each day.

"You think he spends them for drink? He has never crossed the threshold of a saloon.

"You think he gambles them away? No one ever saw a card between his fingers.

"That's the truth. César Escouffiat really exists. He is a miner without being a drunkard or a gambler. When I tell you that he is a queer bird, you can take my word for it. Besides, I want to show him to you to-morrow—that is, if you really want to see him.

"To come back to the present moment, let me say that your whisky is not everlasting and that my throat has forgotten the taste of it this half hour. Besides, I am boring you to death with my gossip, and I see that in spite of your politeness you are nodding with sleepiness."

And without another word, Gregory Land spreads a

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

skin on the floor in front of the fire. He draws up his knees to the height of his chin, and soon a rhythmic grunting tells me that Gregory Land, the mail carrier, is sleeping the sleep of those who are conscious of having accomplished a full day's work.

\* \* \* \*

The barking of dogs awakens me with a start. It is Gregory Land, who is giving two of his dogs a sound whipping. As the lash falls, the beasts howl and bare their fangs, with lowered ears and eyes moist with tears. The whip of caribou hide uncoils itself and encircles in turn the flanks of each dog.

Gregory has a sense of justice in his blood. At every blow, he counts: "One for Ruf, one for Chappy."

I try to intervene. Gregory stops me with a movement of his hand.

"Leave me alone, sir; leave me alone. It's that rascal Chappy, who wanted to take the leader's place."

"But why whip Ruf, then?"

"Because Ruf is a son of a pig, because he is as cowardly as a hare, and because he trembles all over in the presence of that cursed bitch Chappy."

Gregory doesn't like cowards. That is why Ruf gets two extra blows.

Unmoved, the other dogs wait for the punishment to

## THE MAN WITH THE TOP HAT

come to an end. Each one is in position, at the place assigned to him, near his own harness.

The mail carrier is a master dog driver. Soon he has his team hitched. I take my place on the sled, between two sacks of mail. Gregory climbs up and stands on the *taku*, gathers his reins, gayly cracks his whip, and dashes forward over the trail, as he begins a complicated lament in which there is a vague reference to the love affair of a barmaid with an intrepid mail carrier or *coureur de bois*.

\* \* \* \*

Thirty-five miles are nothing for the mail stage, especially when the sled is drawn by a team of Labradors crossed with Eskimo Huskies, and when this team is driven by a master like Gregory Land. I mean, of course, thirty-five miles of good trails; but that was not our case.

To reach the camp at Kid's City, it was necessary to cross a vast expanse of tundra, which appeared at first sight smooth, but which in reality was simply a long succession of frozen ridges, some of which were as much as eight or ten feet high. It was a veritable scenic railway, if I may use the expression.

Never have I seen a more dismal landscape—shaggy grass that well deserves its name of "woman's head," and entangled roots in which the dogs' feet were caught as



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

in a trap. This was particularly irritating to the team, which barked furiously.

Here and there is a clump of bushes, frail or stunted, willows and elders, pitiful trees, poor suffering things resembling the offspring of septuagenarians. Their sap is exhausted and they bear, in spite of their youth, all the marks of premature withering.

I try to recall the previous spring, when, on the northwest coast, where it is protected from the storms, I beheld flowers of marvelous colors spread out before me as far as the eye could reach. The lofty spruce trees of never-changing green, silent guardians of the impassive mountains, watched like legendary characters over this dream-like efflorescence.

But now the spring is dead. Was there a spring after all? I doubt it. The sky is low and of a silvery gray, resembling a leaden mantle that is about to cover the plain.

The sacks of mail and the corner of the sled dig into my ribs at every turn. I restrain a cry, and Gregory howls an oath.

\* \* \* \*

We have crossed the tundra. Gregory stops his team. The panting dogs breathe hard, with lolling tongues, eyes blinking faster, and heaving sides.

## THE MAN WITH THE TOP HAT

The mail carrier carefully examines his dogs' feet.

"Well, there's nothing broken. Everything's all right. But some day I'm surely going to be left out here with the government mail."

This thought makes him cheerful, but I am at a loss to know why. When he has stopped laughing, he adds:

"If I didn't know that Hell is paved with good intentions, I would believe that it is really built like this road."

Then he explains:

"What you have just seen is nothing. Farther to the northeast, toward the Great Fish River, from Chesterfield Inlet to the Arctic Ocean, I know a territory six hundred miles long, where you have, on a large scale, what you have just seen in miniature.

"Even so, it isn't so bad in winter. Legs are broken in the roots and the ice, but in summer the bogs are waiting to swallow you up. And an extensive creeping vegetation of lichens and mosses lays snares that are hard to avoid.

"It is a land of utter desolation, where nothing grows except coral berries, black moss, and stone crop or caribou bread.

"Hey, boys, you're not going to sleep here! Come, up with you, and get to work!"

The whip cracks, the dogs tug at the harness, and the sled moves forward once more.

\* \* \* \*

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Now the trail runs past a fringe of white thorns, spruces and pines, canoe birches, balsams, and aspens in great numbers.

The dogs cover the last ten miles in a frolic. Instinct tells them that the stage is nearing its end.

Gregory urges them on with his voice and merrily begins to sing:

When you come to the end of a perfect day.

Suddenly he stops his song and utters inarticulate cries, accompanied by the crack-crack of the whip and the wild barking of the dogs. A brown line appears. It is the mining camp of Kid's City.

\* \* \* \*

The racket made by Gregory, his whip, and his dogs announces the arrival of the mail. In a few minutes the shanties are emptied. Even the men who are at the bar come to the doorstep.

They all greet us with hurrahs. I was right; Gregory Land is the most eagerly awaited man in town. Even those who expect nothing from his arrival are around his sled.

It is there that I see the roughest faces relax. Now a gloomy face is lit up at the sound of a name; now a hard-set, ruthless, and wicked jaw opens with a broad smile at

## THE MAN WITH THE TOP HAT

the sight of a package of a few ounces; and then the hands—all those reaching hands—calloused, rough, and cut hands—tremble like fluttering birds' wings. Some of them present a whiter tone. Where do they come from? What are they doing there? Others are chapped and swollen with blisters. Still others have their wrists clasped by bracelets of laced leather and have knotted fingers, hooked fingers, fingers crushed into the shape of a spatula, obstinate fingers, and fingers that are trembling with impatience.

Each one receives his treasure and withdraws to relish the joy of feeling himself less lonely, less lost in the immensity of these mysterious regions.

As for those who have nothing, their fingers come together, their hands contract and fall to their sides; while their faces resume their mask, with furrowed brow, stern gaze, and clamped jaws.

\* \* \* \*

"Ouf! It's all over," says Gregory Land, after putting away his sled and releasing his dogs; "and I know what you are going to ask. You want to know which one of those fellows is the one that we are interested in. None of them. Come along with me."

Being accustomed to his ways, I follow him without asking for further explanations. We go up through the

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

camp, which presents an unusual appearance, for to-day is Sunday.

Kid's City has, to be sure, its central street, pompously called Broadway. Beyond Broadway there is nothing but limitless snow fields. And yet, it is over this route that Gregory sets out. We make a right turn, and suddenly I have before my eyes a most unexpected sight—the most unlooked-for thing in existence. Here in the heart of Alaska, in a mining camp, in a temperature more than twenty-two degrees below zero, I have before my eyes a living, walking man wearing a top hat and a frock coat that strikes his heels.

Of course, Gregory brought me here for the sole purpose of enjoying this moment's pleasure and my bewilderment. He holds his sides and laughs like a fool. The man turns round, cutting short the laughter of the mail carrier, who cries almost respectfully:

"Hello, comrade! I'm bringing you one of your compatriots. I thought you would like to see him."

The man removes his top hat, bows ceremoniously, and says:

"You did well to bring him, sir."

Gregory steals away and leaves us alone.

I venture a polite phrase and say:

"I am happy to meet a Frenchman."

The stranger raises his hat again and replies:

## THE MAN WITH THE TOP HAT

"The honor is all mine, monsieur."

Then he talks with me in the simplest way in the world, inquiring about my life, about my past, about France. I look at him, dazed.

"I see that I perplex you," he adds.

"Upon my word, I admit it. Your clothes are so strange."

And I blurt out abruptly:

"Why the Devil are you wearing a top hat?"

Fixedly he looks at me and lets fall these words:

*"Because it is Sunday!"*

\* \* \* \*

*Because it is Sunday!* Not until then do I look at the man who has just given me such a convincing reason. He is a stockily built fellow, a native of the Cévennes Mountains, from the Department of Aveyron or Lozère, I could swear to it; and a moment later, when I recall the name that Gregory gives him, César Escouffiat, I am no longer astonished.

Then I understand the infinite meaning of this reply:

*"Because it is Sunday!"*

The whole soul of France is there—the soul of the peasant and the soul of the bourgeois, so identically the same. Sunday means the new blouse well starched or the frock coat taken from the wardrobe—Sunday with all the



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

tradition and all the sentimental beauty of the race. Suddenly the snow vanishes, and the sky divests itself of its gray to take on a slightly blue tint. I hear the bells of my home town, I see the laughing bands of girls and boys under the leafy plane trees, the independent gentlemen with modest incomes sitting on the bench of the promenade, and the old people on their doorsteps. And I smell all the fragrance that rises from my native land. . . .

And I think of all the battles that the man-who-wears-a-top-hat must have fought in order to make his will respected.

The mountaineer's fists reassure me. The first man to laugh at his headdress must have been silenced long ago, and this must have compelled the respect of the others. Since then, they have all let him celebrate in peace, and in his own way, the day that the Lord created for rest.

\* \* \* \*

I had not come to the end of my surprises.

"Will you be kind enough to come to my house?"

How can I refuse an invitation given in that way?

I nod assent and follow the man-who-wears-a-top-hat and whose frock coat strikes his heels. César Escouffiat does me the honors of his home. Before the door of his hut, he steps aside to let me pass.

"Excuse me," he says.

## THE MAN WITH THE TOP HAT

And brushing his hat with his sleeve, he wraps it in tissue paper, puts it carefully in a wooden chest, then raises, one after the other, the tails of his frock coat, and sits down.

"Excuse me," he repeats. "The dwelling of the wise man is simple, but wisdom is developed everywhere, provided it does not let its soul sink to the level of its promiscuous surroundings."

I look at my host in bewilderment, but he continues, without heeding me:

Ἑσθλῶν μὲν γὰρ ἀπ' ἐσθλὰ διδάξει ἄνθρωπος δὲ κακοῖσιν  
συμμίσγῃς ἀπολεῖς καὶ τὸν ἐόντα νόον.

These are two verses from Theognis, which Xenophon and Plato put into the mouth of Socrates—Xenophon in the *Memorabilia*, and Plato in the *Symposium* and the *Meno*.

My bewilderment gives way to stupefaction. My eyes must be round with astonishment and my mouth wide open. César Escouffiat deigns to explain.

"With the wise you will learn wisdom; if you mingle with the wicked, you will lose all the good that is in you."

Then he adds with condescension:

"That's Greek."

"Greek!"

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"Yes, Greek. Does that astonish you?"

"I must confess—you will pardon me—in this country. . . ."

I stammer and get entangled in sentences that I begin and cannot finish. César Escouffiat takes pity on me and, full of self-sufficiency, relishes his triumph.

"Child!" he says with an indescribable accent.

In his mouth this word assumes a disparaging meaning, and he lets it fall with a somewhat contemptuous grimace. Fortunately, I am not oversensitive that day.

I look at the broad shoulders of this splendid human beast—that short neck, that massive face, that hair shorn close over the narrow forehead, that strong nose, those fleshy lips, that determined chin. Of course, I did not expect to find the Greek race there. In this face one clearly reads all the stubbornness, all the resolution, all the brutishness of the Romans.

Anticipating my questions, he deigns to enlighten me:

"You are going to ask me whether I am a professor who has given up his chair, a priest who has escaped from the Seminary, or a scholar expelled from the University. No, I am nothing of the sort; I am just César Escouffiat, and I am a teamster by trade."

He sits down beside me on the chest where the famous top hat is kept. For a moment he enjoys my stupefaction, and then adds:

## THE MAN WITH THE TOP HAT

"I went to school until I was eleven years old. I herded pigs until I was fifteen. I am now fifty years old, and I have been here nearly ten years."

There is a gap in the good man's explanations. Who will ever know what he did between the ages of fifteen and forty? César Escouffiat has jumped without transition from his early youth to his maturity.

Timidly I venture to ask:

"And you learned Greek?"

"Yes, sir, right here. The solitudes of the North are bad counselors; but when you have a well tempered soul, you resist temptations. That is not always easy, and I say with Hesiod:

Τὴν μὲν γὰρ κακότητα καὶ ἰλαδὸν ἐστὶν ἐλέσθαι.

I must look like Henriette in *Les Femmes savantes*, when she says:

"Pardonnez-moi, monsieur, je n'entends pas le grec."<sup>1</sup>

César translates:

"It is easy, even in a throng, to reach the abode of vice. It lives near us, and the road is smooth. But the Immortal Gods have placed fatigue and sweat on the roads to virtue. A long and steep path leads up to it. At first it

<sup>1</sup> "Pardon me, sir; I don't understand Greek."

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

is rough, but when you reach the summit, it becomes easy.

"Furthermore, Epicharmus of Cos tells us in a different form:

. . . τῶν πόνων

Πωλοῦσιν ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ γασθ' οἱ θεοί.

"The gods sell us all good things at the price of our fatigues. Happiness is bought. I have paid for it, and I can enjoy it. In this respect, I imitate the example of my sole master, Socrates. I am hardened against the cold and so used to contenting myself with little that a mere trifle satisfies my needs.

"In the worst surroundings I remain a stranger. I have not the slightest desire to impose my authority. Xenophon will tell you that such was the custom of the great philosopher.

"Like him, I am frugal. I never drink unless I am thirsty; and I shun alcoholic beverages that injure at the same time the stomach, the head, and the mind.

. . . . καὶ γὰρ τὰ λυμαινόμενα γαστέρας  
καὶ κεφαλᾶς καὶ ψυχᾶς ταῦτ' ἔφη εἶναι.

"I work because Hesiod said: 'Action is nothing to be ashamed of, but inaction is a disgrace.' "

"And you learned Greek?"

## THE MAN WITH THE TOP HAT

He answers with pride:

"All alone, sir, all alone."

"But, after all, why did you learn it?"

"Why? Because I was bored, sir."

César Escouffiat gets up. He opens the chest, removes the tissue paper with meticulous care, and once more shines the nap of the indescribable hat.

While he is performing this grave duty, I look about me, and on a shelf I see books lying pell-mell amidst cans of salmon and condensed milk. A few titles arrest my attention: Isocrates, *Advice to Demonicus*; Euripides, *Electra*; Æschylus, *Prometheus Bound*; Saint John Chrysostom, *Homily in Favor of Eutropus*; Plato, *The Apology of Socrates*; Æsop, *Selected Fables*. Others lie with big dictionaries on an overturned box that serves as a bedside table, but I shall never know the names of the authors. César Escouffiat places his top hat again on his head. Then turning to me, he removes it with a sweeping gesture, bows, and says:

"The world is full of surprises. I am happy to have met you. Shall we meet again? It is hardly probable. What man knows his destiny? All things are born and die, some pretend; nothing is engendered and nothing perishes, others declare. Whom shall we believe? It would be better for man never to be born, as Sophocles explains to us in *Œdipus at Colonos*, verses 1215 to 1220."



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

And César Escouffiat concludes plainly, in good French this time:

"I shall not keep you any longer."

\* \* \* \*

In front of the saloon I find Gregory Land waiting, with a jeering look and his hands in his pockets.

He winks at me in his customary way and shouts from as far away as he can see me:

"Well, my boy, he's certainly a peculiar bird, isn't he? You are still quite dumbfounded over it. Come in, boy, come in. I've had them prepare for you an oyster prayer that you won't forget."

And with a push Gregory Land sends me into the bar-room, where, in a bluish smoke, a hundred miners are dancing to the sound of a noisy phonograph.

\* \* \* \*

"I have finished my rounds. I'm going down to the coast again, and I'll take you back on my way."

"All right."

Accompanied by the cracking of the whip and Gregory's "Eho-o-o," the sled passes like a whirlwind through the middle of the camp, amidst the farewell shouts of the assembled miners.

A hundred and fifty paces away, I see the ponderous

## THE MAN WITH THE TOP HAT

silhouette of César Escouffiat, who was in turn swineherd and teamster, and who, as a miner in the mines of Alaska, learned Greek to drive away his loneliness.

He walks gravely, with measured tread. One might believe him to be absorbed in vulgar reflections. Under the top hat the brain is performing its obscure work, and the massive jaws are ruminating Greek quotations.

I hail him with a friendly greeting; but the man, buried in his dream, does not hear it. The sled makes a turn, the silhouette dwindles and seems to sink into the earth. I turn round on my seat, and I still see the top hat—far, far away in the distance. For a long time it is a black speck against the whiteness of the polar snow.

The wind that sweeps the trail lashes my face, and I close my eyes. When I open them again, there is nothing more on the horizon.

Nevermore shall I see the man-who-wore-a-top-hat *because it was Sunday*. Suddenly, and without reason, an infinite sadness comes over me.

\* \* \* \*

“You’re crying, my word!”

“Crying? You’re crazy, Gregory; it’s this devilish wind that stings my eyes.”



## VIII

### THE SOCIABLE BEAST

FOR three hours the gale has been raging. The wind shakes the hut, though it is well sheltered and protected, at the same time, by the mountain and by a thick curtain of spruce trees.

Naturally, the thermometer cannot be far from forty below zero, as is proper for a thermometer in use beyond the seventieth degree, north latitude.

Outside, my dogs are asleep—all except Tempest, my Eskimo Husky, whom I have kept at my side. A fairly bright fire is crackling, and the kettle is beginning to sing its song.

Tempest lies crouching with his muzzle between his

## THE SOCIABLE BEAST

paws. His evident contentment is betrayed by a little sniff and a short tremor of his stiff hair, on which the last icicles are melting.

Having nothing else to do, I get my sewing kit and take it upon myself to mend my leather shirt, which is in a sorry condition.

I draw the needle fast enough to give odds, as they say, to a sewing machine itself. From time to time Tempest opens one eye, growls a little louder, then relapses into drowsiness.

It is necessary to have lived in solitude to understand the joy of being able to speak to a human being. The most cruel privations are nothing in comparison with the frightful torture of silence—being alone in the presence of the most beautiful scenery in the world, alone with one's thoughts turning round and round in the brain like a caged animal, feeling one's reason slipping away little by little, drunk with solitude to the point of reeling, hungering to speak to something living!

Under the flaming sky of Arizona, where the cacti rise like gigantic seven-branched candlesticks, I used to talk to my horse. Here at the farthest confines of the world, I find peace, and, with peace, wisdom, while discoursing with my dog.

"Isn't this frightful weather, Tempest?"

Tempest growls; therefore he approves.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"A kind of weather that men—who are unjust because they are men—call *dogs' weather*." <sup>1</sup>

Evidently he agrees with me.

I continue my monologue:

"There is no such thing as justice. What is justice, after all? A mere word. And what are judges? Less than nothing—mere men. If you should see them, Mr. Tempest, in my own country, in my civilized country, you would observe that they are dressed in red and black and that little white bibs are tucked under their chins. Don't think for that reason that they are in their infancy, or simply doting! No, that's just the custom. In British territory they have wigs as high as this."

My gesture and my reasoning frighten Tempest, who straightens up and shows his fangs. His uncivilized soul will never understand the beauties of our world.

Let us change the subject.

"There! Draw in your barbarous fangs. I am right, just the same. If there were any justice, you would be outside with your companions, sleeping under the snow, and not in front of the fire, roasting your paws."

Mr. Tempest doesn't want to hear any more. He doesn't even open his left eye again. His ears lie back, and he dreams aloud before the dancing flames.

Suddenly he straightens up, with ears erect and mouth

<sup>1</sup> Temps de chien—French idiom.



## *THE SOCIABLE BEAST*

open. Gruffly he barks three times and half folds back his ear. He is on the alert. Again he barks, and then dashes toward the door.

I listen. Nothing. Only the hissing of the wind as it passes by in a whirl.

"What a crazy idea to want to go out! Anyway, go, if such is your wish."

I open the door. A whirlwind of snow strikes my face.

"Damned dog!"

Tempest darts away like an arrow. In the inclosure the other dogs are awake and howling in unison.

"Damned dog!"

I repeat the oath and move toward the door to close it again, when suddenly I hear a clear voice calling me:

"Hello! Call your dog. He's a demon. He'd eat me alive!"

I run along the trail and whistle to Tempest, who comes and places himself near me, showing his fangs and still grumbling.

"Who goes there?"

"A friend—Mac O'Neil. What weather, old chap!"

"Come in and get warm."

"I won't say nay to that. Wait a bit. Here, Floch! Here, Dark! For God's sake, hold your demon! They're going to fight!"

I seize Tempest by the scruff of the neck as he is about



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

to rush forth, throw him into the hut, and close the door.

On being released, the man's dogs quickly dig their holes in the snow and disappear.

O'Neil takes off his snowshoes and shakes his cloak. We go inside.

The pleasant warmth envelops us. The traveler utters a delighted "Ah!" as he pulls off the icicles that hang from his mustaches.

Plenty of whisky is poured into the tea. Much whisky and very little tea—that is my companion's idea of what it should be like.

"My lad, I thought you were getting tired of being all alone, so I came to——"

"Thanks."

"Don't mention it. I felt lonely too. I've got the black bug—what do you call it in French? *Le . . . la . . .* you know, the terrible black bug."

"*Le cafard.*"<sup>a</sup>

"That's it. *Le cafard.* In a short time it will be Christmas night."

"Oh! It's Christmas. I had forgotten."

"So I got my snowshoes and came here. Sixteen miles—a mere trifle. The Stewart is frozen solid. It's a wonderful trail; but from Caribou Kid on, the wind blows at an angle. And it isn't warm either."

<sup>a</sup> *Le cafard*—the French equivalent of "the blues," also cockroach.

## THE SOCIABLE BEAST

He holds his fingers to the flame; then, kneading his hands, he makes his knuckles crack. He stretches out his legs, which are wrapped in blue fox skins, and the latter thaw out on coming in contact with the fire. He too could not stay alone. I gaze at the stranger. He is happy to be alive, and his eyelids blink faster. He talks, talks, and talks.

And yet, he is not an intellectual, not a brainy man, this fellow. He is a wonderful brute, cut out for fighting.

Thoughts, fluttering here and there, have struck their wings against the narrow cage of this brain. And the man has traveled sixteen miles in abominable weather, fleeing straight ahead, risking death a hundred times, in order not to remain alone this evening—alone with thoughts that gnaw, thoughts that bore, thoughts that drive one to madness, thoughts that kill.

At last the man stops speaking. He smokes his pipe in silence, with slow and measured puffs, while the bluish smoke envelops his head. He half closes his eyelids. A little more, and he would be growling with contentment like Tempest.

Man is a sociable animal, and this animal is happy now.

\* \* \* \*

When Mac O'Neil has finished smoking, he taps his short pipe against his heel and says:

"Yes, I was so bored that I thought I was going to

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

croak. Talking to your dogs is no fun. It's been forty days since Gregory Land passed with the mail. He left me a number of the *Seattle Post Intelligencer*. I know it by heart, and could recite to you the articles and the advertisements. Gregory is the man who told me that you were camping on the Stewart. He told me also that you were a Frenchman. I'm a Scotchman, aye [here Mac O'Neil raises his otter-skin cap]. I like France, and I'm neither a crawfish nor a gum-chewer. So I thought to myself: 'That fellow must be enjoying himself as much as I am; I'm going to go and see him.' And here I am. Does the land pay here?" he adds after a moment.

"Bah! Eight or nine cents a pan."

Mac O'Neil whistles with surprise.

"This is what it gives at my place."

And in the hollow of his rough hand the miner holds out to me some nuggets as big as almonds.

When I have appraised their value, he puts them into a little cloth bag that has contained tobacco. As he draws the strings and ties them carefully, he heaves a sigh.

"We'd have a fine Christmas with that in Glasgow. I know a pub in the lower town where the ale has the color of honey. And the ham!"

Memories of former feasts swarm upon him, and he slaps his thigh and laughs with coarse laughter.

"Once at my father's house they had shot a young wild

## THE SOCIABLE BEAST

boar on Lord Denshire's estate. Between you and me, we had shot it without permission; and we had stuffed the beast—I mean the boar, not the Lord—with sausages and chestnuts. All the neighbors were at the party, and—as is proper—each one has brought along his present. Whisky, aye, good auld Scotch whisky, was there in plenty.”

And Mac O'Neil makes his tongue smack.

“On the hearth a whole log was burning. Now and then the flames cast a great glare that lit up the faces of the lassies, and the lassies were laughing because the lads were tickling them. The next day my father and I were the only ones at the table.”

“And the neighbors?”

“The neighbors? They were under it.”

In conclusion, the miner says:

“It certainly was a fine Christmas!”

Then the man relates other memories. But I no longer listen; his voice is like a purring in my ear. Am I dozing, or am I dreaming? These reminiscences bring up a long procession of forgotten phantoms. . . .

I see the family ceremonies—my father, my mother, my sisters, my brothers—the big table around which we were gathered, waiting for midnight to strike.

I see Père Noël,\* loaded with coveted toys—dolls for

\* The French Santa Claus.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

my sisters and books for me. I clearly see their red covers, their gilt edges, and their flaming titles: *Le Sphinx des glaces*, *Le Capitaine Hatteras*.

The mystery of the polar regions attracts me.

It is the Great White Silence.

Hey! What's this? . . . Oh, yes, I am not dreaming . . . the frozen solitudes and the eternal snows are here at hand.

Tempest has resumed his place near the hearth. He growls and looks happy. Mac O'Neil mixes a masterly cocktail, and talks and talks.

I recall the Christmases of my student days, in the aristocratic city where the sky is merciful. The curtain of the night is pierced with stars; and the young men pass in procession, singing ribald songs. Comrades, I see you all. There is Broche, so tipsy and so funny; there is Bartek with the broad smile, also Sapiens and Catacloum. And I see you too, Lise, Margot, Daisy, Mourette—you dolls who charmed our souls when we were twenty.

The bells are ringing in full peal, the bells that sang at my birth and the bells that wept over the coffin of my father. The wind wafts their grave voices to me as they pass, now over the sea, now over the land; and after a journey of eight thousand leagues they bring joy to my soul and sunshine to my heart.

Christmases of Provence made bright with naïve faith!

## THE SOCIABLE BEAST

The *Santouns*, or Saints, come to adore the infant on the straw of the stable; and the Magi and the shepherds are there, all clad in such funny garments. And I distinctly hear a short dialogue that is constantly repeated.

Herod is there, Herod the wicked king, killer of children, the only one who speaks French—because he is the King. The servant arrives, dressed in a sheepskin. He speaks Provençal, because he is of humble birth.

“Gran Rei, vaqui li reis Mages.”<sup>4</sup>

And Herod, who speaks French, because he is the King, extends his hands with majesty and lets fall from his august lips this phrase:

“Dizi qui z’entrent.”<sup>5</sup>

Then the crowd, simple and naïve, begins to laugh. I hear this laughter along with the voice of the bells.

“Hey there! My dear lad, you’re dozing.”

And Mac O’Neil straightens me up with a push.

Then he goes out, after taking his whip of caribou hide, in order to thrash his dogs, who are howling in unison with the storm.

<sup>4</sup> “Great King, here are the Magi Kings.”

<sup>5</sup> “Tell them to come in.” (Faulty and comical pronunciation of French.)





## IX

### THE GNAWING BEAST

WERE it not for the Winchester that is slung from my shoulder, I should look like a prehistoric man, as I come down the steep slopes of Blackmount.

I have set out on a mountain hike, and I have been lucky enough to kill a *tebai*—a sort of small chamois with white fur. I am carrying the animal around my neck, holding it by the legs.

I leap from rock to rock, while my dog Tempest yelps and jumps around me.

I put on my snowshoes at the foot of the mountain, in a hut formerly occupied by a trapper of the Hudson Bay Company. Then, like an arrow, I dart forward,

## THE GNAWING BEAST

with my prey on my shoulders and my dog racing with me.

A good hunt means a joyful return. With a trained hand, I remove the animal's skin and hang it up to dry. I cut off a haunch and put it on the spit; while outside, Tempest and his companions fight for the victim's entrails.

\* \* \* \*

The spruce branches send up sheaves of sparks. I sniff with joy the odor of the roast. By George, I'm going to have a feast! From my canteen I take out a bottle of champagne—good old champagne from France, and not champagne type from California. Alas, it is the only bottle left! Too bad! To-night Lucullus will dine with Lucullus. Carefully I set the table; I am going to eat in grand style.

Upon an overturned box I spread a Portland newspaper—the latest news from the civilized world, now three months old! That is my tablecloth. On it I place my aluminum plate, my folding fork that I open with a sharp click, and my supply of salt and pepper that I keep in a hollow reed, like our shepherds of Languedoc.

I laugh for no reason, rubbing my hands together. What's that? Blood? Why yes, blood . . . oh, I see, blood from the animal.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

I go out. A little snow, and it will be gone.

The gluttoned dogs are dozing. Only Tempest gets up. Recognizing me, he comes and smells me. He looks at me with his kind, imploring eyes, and wags his tail. Yes, I see what you're after; you would like to go inside with me. You know that there is a good, crackling fire there and a few bones to pick up. No, no, my dear Tempest; you must stay with your comrades.

The dog understands that I don't want him. Sadly he goes away, with arched back, drooping tail, and head to the ground.

This table that is set, this meat that is cooking—all this is for me. I am going to feast—yes, feast all alone.

All alone?

Yes, all alone.

These two words hammer against my temples. It is true. I am alone to-night, have been alone for months, and shall still be alone to-morrow and the days following. Shall I be alone forever, then?

Why does this idea haunt my brain?

Begone, wicked thoughts!

One would say that I am drunk. But I swear to God that not a drop of alcohol has touched my lips for seven weeks. I feel very queer.

Bah! It can't be anything serious. I have been fasting since this morning; perhaps it is hunger.

## THE GNAWING BEAST

It is the blood on my hands that has troubled me. Why? I am not Macbeth, and I am not suffering the remorse that racked his soul. They can do nothing to me, these phantoms that arise. My hands are free from all stain—my poor white hands of former days, now chapped and rough and accustomed to serve themselves.

How absurd! Come, Freddy, old comrade; you promised yourself a feast. . . . What are you waiting for? The viands are ready, and the wine is drawn.

I try to cheer up. The cork pops, and the blond wine forms a white froth.

Ah! I feel better! By all the demons of Hell, I'm glad to be alive! And I sing:

Nargue la tristesse  
Et l'ivresse,  
Chasse pour aujourd'hui  
Les ennuis. . . .

I empty my glass in one draught. I tell you I feel much better. Now, let's go. . . . And I stick my knife into the savory meat.

I am a famous cook. I pay myself immodest compliments, which my pride accepts.

Too bad to be all alone!

Eh? What? Who spoke? I jump up, my knife in my hand. I open the door. Nobody. I'm crazy this evening; what can be the matter with me?

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

I sit down again, or rather I fall down dejected on the wooden stool.

A thin thread of smoke ascends from the meat, and white globules keep rising from the bottom of the glass. The meat is tasteless and the wine bad. I am no longer hungry and no longer thirsty.

O God! O God! Spare me. Drive from my brain this frightful, gnawing beast. I feel it approaching; there it comes; there it is. I hear the mysterious working of its legs. Slyly it creeps along, groping its way with its frail feelers.

I am afraid, I who did not recoil before the grizzly of the Rockies. I am all alone. Lord, do not forsake me! I am all alone, all alone—lost in the white immensity of the polar regions.

What am I to do? What is to become of me? My feverish pulse beats rapidly in my wrists and temples. I am hot, but my teeth chatter.

If I should happen to die here, who would know it? No one.

No, no; I don't want to die. I don't want to die. Help, some one; come, come. . . . I don't want to remain all alone.

Mamma, mamma, I'm afraid of the wicked beast. I am helpless against it; it gnaws my brain, bores into my head, and gluts itself on my blood, bit by bit.

## THE GNAWING BEAST

I open the door and yell into the night:

"Here, Tempest; here, Tempest!"

The dog, believing me in danger, runs up, barking furiously.

"Come in."

Frightened, fearing to be whipped, the dog crawls past.

"No, my poor old fellow, I don't want to hurt you. Come, my dog; come near me, nearer still."

Tempest puts his muzzle on my knees, and his kindly eyes watch me in astonishment. I speak to him and tell him nonsensical things in such a mournful tone that he howls with one continuous sob. . . .

\* \* \* \*

My voice is silent. At last the beast has seized me, clutching my brain and sucking in all my will power. It is impossible to struggle against it. I know that from experience. I am like an empty garment. Everything sinks into the dreadful night, and the terrible nightmare begins.

I am face to face with the ancient belief in the demon of temptation. The spirit of evil is prowling about—yes, there it is. It has many and sundry forms—the jackal of St. Paphnutius, the larvæ of St. Anthony, the serpent of Eve, the Satan of Jesus, the cockroach of the



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Foreign Legion—the proud beast of prey. Yes, yes, there it is!

It is this demon that makes us seek the impossible, that breathes doubt into our souls; it is he that spoils all our joys and that causes us never to be satisfied with ourselves.

Come, come, and haunt my brain; drain my gray matter; glut yourself in the blood of my flesh. Let your hammer strike, strike, strike against my skull. Go, wicked blacksmith; continue your dismal task:

Aux enclumes du mal notre coeur s'est forgé,  
L'oubli, ce forgeron terrible, s'est vengé.<sup>1</sup>

Yes, I thought I could forget; I thought I could banish from my life the moments of affliction. I thought that, by putting eight thousand leagues of water and land between me and the past, I had broken forever the bond that held me to the civilized world, and that I had torn out that page of the book of my life.

Ah! Fool that I am!

There they are, there they are, my old memories. They are arranged in my brain in a single row, like the sarcophagi in the Catacombs. The beast draws the curtain, and the stage becomes animated. . . . The puppets, representing men, begin to stir. All the characters of the eternal

<sup>1</sup> On the anvils of grief our hearts have been forged.  
Oblivion, that terrible smith, has taken his revenge.

## THE GNAWING BEAST

human comedy file past, even those that escaped the attention of Molière and Balzac.

And in the night, black jealousies are awakened.

The jealous lover is there. It is not that old wreck, Bartholo; it is perhaps Pierrot, deceived by Harlequin. Yes, it is Pierrot; he is so pale. Through the window he watches for the woman who does not come. His ear listens to the noises in the street, but he does not hear the tock-tock of the high heel striking the pavement. If he closed his eyes, poor wretch, he would see the mercenary object of all his joy in the arms of another. He could tell you the street, the number, and the floor; and if he listened at the door, he would hear commonplace and ready-made phrases. If he lifted the latch, he would see her, his idol, degrading herself by the basest caresses.

In my brain the beast moves its feelers over all these scenes so that nothing may remain in darkness.

Everything stands out clearly. I hear the noise of the kisses; I see the beautiful dark eyes that shine like two spangles of gold; I see also the lips that are like a rare flower upon which the crimson of the evening sky casts a blood-red reflection.

That thing that was mine, that I molded with my own hands, and into which I breathed my dream—that thing lies there in the gutter, in the depths of human degradation.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Have mercy, Beast, do not show me that!

And the Beast chuckles.

The dawn drives away the throng of night clouds, and the sun comes up with a dazzling light. I long for the sun; I hunger for it in my polar night.

You are not the sun, you milky spot rolling through the wan sky. You are an imitation. An evil spirit has snatched away your crown of glory, or else you yourself have folded up the double fan of your rays in order not to see these regions of desolation.

Great King, they have taken away your bright locks, and with a bald head you rise to the zenith of my polar day.

Yes, remind me that you exist yonder, far away, in all your splendor, and that your shafts are dancing upon the Latin Sea—upon the coves hollowed out of the reddish rocks, upon the gulfs full of blue shadows, upon the house that is all white beneath its cap of red tiles, beside which the leafy plane trees mount guard with motionless cypresses that look like spindles of dark green. From the room that I occupied as a boy, one looks out upon the sea flashing like a naked sword; while beneath the burning sun the boats make brown spots, surmounted by the bright triangular sails.

That is the little room from which my childish dreams went forth, where I was lulled to sleep by the rhythm of

## THE GNAWING BEAST

the waves, and where I trembled with fear, frightened by the winds that passed in gusts, bending the lofty tree-tops and battling with the sea until the sea arose in mad fury.

But the sun returns and warms the stony plain, twisting the vines heavy with grapes; and on the white road buxom lasses are passing by and singing.

The page turns, and the heat abates. I see a colder and a paler sun. Its diffuse light envelops the great city, which rejoices in the unaccustomed blessing. Paris comes into view, but not the Paris of tumult and luxury, nor the Paris of the workingman. Only one spot emerges from the shadow; it is the point of the Ile Saint-Louis.

I have never penetrated this island, and suddenly I am seized by a mad desire to see it right away, right away.

I get up so quickly that Tempest barks.

"Oh yes, there you are. Come."

I go out with whip in hand.

"Come on, boys, get up!"

The astonished dogs come out of their holes, half awake, and shaking the snow from their hair. Several of them yawn and stretch their front legs.

Restlessly Tempest prowls around me. As I jostle him, he takes his stand three feet away and looks at me in complete astonishment.

No, I shall not stay a minute longer. I want to go, I

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

want to go now. In two hours I shall be at Dawson, where I shall settle my affairs. In a week I shall be at White Horse to take the train for Skagway. With a little luck I shall surely find a steamer going down the coast, and ten days later it will land me on the wharves of Vancouver. There I shall take the Canadian Pacific, passing through Fraser Canyon, Banff, and Calgary. Then, crossing the American border, I shall reach New York after a journey of five days by rail. The French Line will surely have a *Rochambeau* or a *Touraine* at the pier; and, if the sea is calm, I shall land at Havre in nine or ten days at the most.

If I arrive at night or at dawn, I can take the express at seven o'clock or at nine. In either case, I shall be in Paris toward noon.

In my mind I calculate the probabilities. Yes, everything is arranged for the best; I shall be in Paris for lunch. This assurance brings me relaxation and relief.

I am sure of myself now. I harness my dogs without impatience; and as my sled dashes over the trail, I catch myself whistling.

\* \* \* \*

But the Beast does not release its prey. For the first mile it resumes its steady hammering, as if to say: "It is I; here I am; I have not gone."

## THE GNAWING BEAST

I make the dogs attain their greatest speed, and I hear their hoarse breathing.

I have a tingling sensation in my eyes, and I feel as if needles are sticking into my skull. Well! I have forgotten my otter-skin cap! What does it matter? The point of the Ile Saint-Louis is there, quite near. One more effort, and I shall reach it.

"Mush, mush on, boys."

I use my whip. Unaccustomed to such treatment, the dogs try to bite one another. Standing on the sled, I howl meaningless words. The maddened beasts tug at the harness, howling also.

Yonder is the Ile Saint-Louis. At last I see its lights.

A trace breaks. The dogs roll over, and the sled upsets. I pick myself up and feel my bones mechanically. There is nothing broken; all is well.

Suddenly I hear a jeering voice beside me.

"You drive like a fool, my boy. Three miles more at that speed, and your dogs will croak."

In the darkness unknown voices add their approval.

Then I, who pass for the wisest, the coolest, and the most sensible of the Yukon miners, go straight up to the man who has spoken these words and, before he has recovered from his surprise, I send a hook to his jaw, laying him out on the muddy snow of Third Avenue.

It is Bobby that I have struck, the one that is called



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Red Bobby—not because of bloody deeds, for he is a kind-hearted fellow, but on account of his ruddy complexion.

Bobby picks himself up. He is a husky giant, but he is still a little dazed. Taking his time, and with coolness, self-confidence, and precision, he sends me a volley of blows that I parry with difficulty.

My legs slip out from under me, and I go down, bumping my head against one of the brass runners of the sled.

When I regain consciousness, I find myself at home in my hut. A great shadow moves back and forth with awkward and hasty movements.

It is Red Bobby, my self-appointed nurse. His enormous hands are cautiously carrying the teapot and the bowl.

“Ah! At last you’ve come to, my boy; and I’m not sorry to see it. I’ve been rather worried about you these last two days. Here, drink this.”

With motherly attention, the kind-hearted giant raises me and makes me drink a mixture of his own composition, in which gin and whisky are certainly the principal ingredients.

Two big tears fall from my eyes; and I weep, and weep, and weep. . . .

“Those tears have got to come,” concludes the rough miner. “If you couldn’t do that, you’d croak. I know something about these attacks. Cry, my boy; cry as much

## THE GNAWING BEAST

as you wish. That drowns the beast-that-trots-in-the-brains-of-men-who-live-in-solitude.

"That was a wonderful wallop you gave me. Do you know that there aren't many men that have put Bobby on his back? No, no; of course, I'm not sore at you. But there's one thing that I want to tell you. It's lucky I don't understand French, because for the last two days you've been telling me a lot of secrets."

Bobby makes me swallow a second bowl of his medicine, and I fall back prostrated upon my cot, while my ears perceive rather distinctly a jerky sound. It is Bobby, who laughs as he says:

"It's proved beyond a doubt that the Black Beast can't stand whisky!"



## X

### THE MAN WHO FOUND A MAMMOTH

"IN those days—excuse me if I speak like an evangelist, but I really don't know how to begin my story. *In those days* is a very convenient expression, for it allows a man to collect his thoughts and find his words.

"In those days—— Damn this leg! Will you arrange my cushion? There, thank you. I'm very sorry. I'll borrow your tobacco pouch, if you don't mind. Thanks."

And Gregory Land crushes the tobacco with his thumb in the palm of his hand, then rolls it into a ball and places it conscientiously in his mouth.

For three weeks now, Gregory Land the mail carrier, the intrepid *coureur de bois*, has been my guest. It was

## THE MAN WHO FOUND A MAMMOTH

lucky for him to break his leg—no, not to break his leg, I don't mean that, but to break it one mile from my cabin, as the dogs were making a bad turn.

So for three weeks I have been acting as bonesetter and nurse. To call it a double sinecure would be a lie, for Gregory is certainly the most impatient patient in the world.

Didn't he speak of setting out again the very next day? Fortunately, a good fever intervened in time and kept him quiet for a few days.

Since then he has been much better, and now spends his time drinking my whisky. It is a sovereign remedy, he claims, for broken bones. He also chews my tobacco, and smokes it when he is tired of chewing it.

At times he also tells me stories. Usually he does all three things at once. Thus, at the present moment, he has a bottle of whisky within reach of his hands, chews his quid, and begins his story with these words:

"In those days——"

These are really not stories, but the history of those heroic times when man was all alone here, fighting the elements.

Those were the times of terrible cold, hunger, thirst, fatigue, overwork, and the constant struggle to checkmate Nature and try to snatch away her prey.

Through the exploits of two rival cities, as large as one

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

eighth of a ward in Chicago, the Greeks persuaded the world for centuries that they were an admirable people. Artists, philosophers, orators, and poets have sung their "immortal glory." Yes, but in the beginning was Homer, and

Trois mille ans ont passé sur la cendre d'Homère  
Et, depuis trois mille ans, Homère respecté  
Est jeune encore de gloire et d'immortalité.<sup>1</sup>

What Homer will celebrate the self-denial and the courage, the determination and the energy of those men who set out to win the modern Golden Fleece, having ahead of them nothing but unknown worlds and virgin solitudes stretching away to infinity amidst thousands of leagues of snow?

Gold, which, in the cities, flows through the fingers like unpolluted water, leaves no trace behind it.

Gold! Symbol of all that is bought and all that is sold. Who knows what it has cost the lonely miner in patience, waiting, and prolonged expectation? Ulysses' companions have been changed into swine; intelligence has been degraded by matter.

You have had no poet to sing your praises, adventurers from every country, who one day came to the land of the

<sup>1</sup> Three thousand years have come and gone o'er Homer's grave;  
And Homer, still revered through thirty centuries,  
Is youthful yet in fame and immortality.

## THE MAN WHO FOUND A MAMMOTH

pay dirt to seek there, if not your fortune, at least the assurance of a life of freedom, far from the narrow rules of our civilizations.

No artist has engraved your exploits on the Temple of Memory, and your sorrows and your joys will not be immortalized for all time.

For you there is no Parthenon, no Panathenæa. But how much simpler, how much more touching are your heaps of stones that here and there emboss the snowy plains, telling the wayfarer that a man whose name will remain unknown is sleeping his last sleep in the very heart of the great white silence!

All these things pass through my mind as Gregory prepares a clever alcoholic combination whose secret, he claims, he alone possesses.

He would bring a fortune to a recipe merchant, this fellow Gregory Land. He knows three hundred and eighty-three ways to make cocktails, and a hundred and twenty ways to cook corn. He knows the art of dressing the white and long-haired skins of the new-born seals, and the prayers for the dead of all the tribes, from the Innuits Eskimos encamped on the shores of the Arctic Ocean to the Ingaliiks, those Indians who came from the Rockies and now live to the east of Alaska.

He is on friendly terms with the Tenankutchins, who have painted faces, and whose hunting grounds follow



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

the course of the Tanana. He can decipher the Thlinkit totems like an old native, has his head crammed with statistics of amazing accuracy, and, what is still better, Gregory knows men's hearts.

Inwardly I think that this mail carrier is a queer fellow; and, while listening to his chattering, I divide my "pay" into three parts. There are nuggets, gold dust, and flour gold, which I preciousy put away in little leather bags.

"You've got a fine lot of 'pay' to-day. You haven't been wasting your time. Oh! What a pretty watch fob that would make!"

And Gregory tosses up in his hand my latest find, a nugget as large as an almond.

The mail carrier examines it with the eyes of a connoisseur, holding it between his thumb and forefinger. Then delicately he places it on the edge of the table and says:

"You have fifty dollars' worth there. Keep trying your luck to the end, as you have a right to do. But, if I'm not mistaken, I had begun to tell a story."

He collects his thoughts and, for the tenth time, he repeats:

"In those days——"

I burst out laughing.

"You are right to make fun of me, old chap; but I

## THE MAN WHO FOUND A MAMMOTH

really know more than the beginning. In those days the mouths of Fame informed all the good-for-naughts—who are good for everything—on this terrestrial ball that gold was growing in Alaska as wheat grows in July in the fields of Manitoba. All you had to do was to stoop to fill your pockets. A trapper, with the toe of his shoe, had rolled out a nugget as big as a duck's egg; another, while digging to set a trap, had brought to light a whole vein. And imaginations began to run wild.

"The Yukon Valley was soon invaded by a throng of apprentices who had come to get rich. I shall say nothing of those who fell by the wayside, those who made scandalous fortunes in a few days and lost them in a few hours, and those who, with greater shrewdness, let the others do the work and calmly awaited their return in the White Horse Passes and in the dives of Skagway.

"Those were great days. I was in it too, I who am speaking to you. Yes, I was in it."

And Gregory proudly draws up his torso, which moves his leg and draws a cry from him. But at once he resumes his story:

"And these hands that you see have helped to string up many a bad man. I tell you, you had to do your own police service. The Government—God protect it—did not yet presume to meddle in our affairs.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"When in Rome, do as the Romans do. This, I believe, you translate into your language by 'One must howl with the wolves.'

"So I howled, as you say. I worked and found gold, which I lost, and I drank a good deal of gin and whisky in all the saloons that are scattered from the source of the Yukon as far as the Porcupine.

"Did I see some astonishing things? Astonishing is the word. Well, that's why I began to tell you my story. The most curious story, assuredly, is the adventure of the man who, having come to look for gold, found none and made his fortune just the same,"

"Eh?"

"Oh! So you are interested in my stories, are you? My cushion—here, if you please. Thanks. Have a little whisky? No? Then half for you and half for me."

Gregory Land takes his time, swallows his alcohol in little sips, winks his eye at me, then goes on:

"The thing happened on the Lewes River. It was witnessed by three hundred miners who could testify that I am telling you the truth, and not bedtime stories.

"Patrick Packing—an Irishman, of course—was a kind, red-haired giant, gentle as a little girl—a little girl who drank her bottle of whisky every day, or rather every night; for it was at night that Patrick took his drink. But he carried his drink well and kept his even temper. He

## THE MAN WHO FOUND A MAMMOTH

was well thought of in our camp, but he was not a lucky fellow.

"He had bought a whole hill for a hundred dollars. And he wore himself out with work—toiling, hacking, undermining, ruining his eyes in search of the finest particle of gold. But as for gold, he found not even that much—not even an ounce.

"To the left and to the right, his companions were gathering 'pay' at will. It was enough to make a man strike his head against a rock. But Patrick did no such stupid thing, wherein he acted like a reasonable man.

"'My turn will come,' he would repeat philosophically.

"And it really did come. One afternoon he warned his comrades that they would have to go farther away. He wanted to explode a rather large mine, and assured them that certain signs revealed to him the unmistakable presence of a vein.

"He lit his fuse and came to take shelter with his companions. The blast was a great success; and when the smoke had cleared, the hill looked as if it had been cut with a knife. A yawning hole appeared. Clearing the entrance, Patrick and his friends penetrated into an immense cavern. But as soon as they had taken a few steps, they recoiled in horror.

"Like a good Irishman, Patrick made the sign of the cross, and went back to face the danger. Then he came

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

to the realization that he was in the presence of a gigantic mammoth.

"Yes, sir, a mammoth, a real mammoth of flesh, skin, hair, bone, and ivory—one of those mammoths that were the sovereigns of the world in the Tertiary or the Quaternary period.

"There he was, admirably preserved—terrifying, monstrous, magnificent. On his back he had long hairs that formed a mane, and under these hairs you could see a woolly padding. But the wonderful thing was the tusks, enormous tusks curved in the shape of spirals. Patrick measured them. They were eleven feet and three inches long; yes, eleven feet and three inches exactly.

"Jack London, whom I met when he was here, and who was the best companion in the world—he is dead now, and his soul is at peace with the Lord—Jack London has told how a certain Thomas Stevens, who was his guest for a whole evening, had killed the last mammoth. It had happened in a very simple way. The beast had crushed the seven little pups of his dog Klooch. To avenge himself, Thomas Stevens had pursued the animal, keeping him from eating, drinking, and sleeping; and making him turn round and round in a valley, as in a circus, for days and nights. The mammoth had died of fatigue and exhaustion.

"And Jack London himself advises his readers to take

## THE MAN WHO FOUND A MAMMOTH

Thomas Stevens' word for the story. And he tells the incredulous to go and look for the famous hunter, whom they will certainly find somewhere in this region, between the Pole and the fifty-third degree of north latitude, if not on the east coast of Siberia, or at the farthest limits of Labrador.

"So for many people Jack London's mammoth is a myth. But Patrick Packing's mammoth was a reality. To look for gold and to find an animal older than the flood is no ordinary thing.

"The miners made fun of Patrick and asked him if that was a sign of a gold vein.

"Patrick let them talk. He was thinking. One morning he intrusted his land and his mammoth to a comrade, and off he went.

"The comrade profited by the occasion to collect a dollar from those who wanted to see the animal. For two dollars they were entitled to one of the hairs.

"Look, see this little braided chain. Those are hairs from Patrick's mammoth. That's a fact.

"Day after day passed. At last Patrick returned. It was a great event, for he was accompanied by real gentlemen—old men with spectacles, discussing and waving their very short arms.

"They were disputing with Latin words. They were speaking about the *protapirus*, the hypothetical ancestor,



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

and about the *hypotapirus*, grandfather of the elephants and artiodactyls. Another asserted that they were in the presence of the only specimen of the *cherodon*, no less ancestor and no less hypothetical than the *protapirus*.

"A tall, thin man, who looked like a clothes-hanger in a frock coat, was certain that it was one of the *proproboscidea*, and was sharply answered by a portly man of a kind and jovial disposition, who called his dear colleague an ignoramus, inasmuch as the *proproboscidea* had, it seems, only a rudimentary trunk.

"They exchanged some sugar-coated words of bitterness, and almost came to blows.

"At last, after quoting Pohlrig, Falconer, Gaudry, Brehm, Ameghino, and Cope; and after speaking of *lombrifrons*, *ganesa*, *isignis*, *hysudricus*, *namadicus*, *angustidens*, *trigonocephalus*, *meridionalis*, and *pentalophodon*; and after going successively from Java to India, from India to China, and from China to Europe, making a detour into Africa; these honorable gentlemen came to an agreement, declaring that they were in the presence of the *Mastodon Americanus et Mirificus* of North America, a contemporary of the *Elephas Primigenius*, both of which lived, as every one knows, in the Quaternary period, unless it was in the Upper Miocene, or perhaps in the Pliocene.

"Finally, it was learned that Patrick had exchanged his

## THE MAN WHO FOUND A MAMMOTH

mammoth for a check for fifty thousand dollars. That was a good piece of business.

"To-day the mammoth is in a museum, and Patrick, with his fifty thousand dollars, is living a happy life on a farm that he bought in the south of Ireland.

"And since we must have a moral," concludes Gregory Land, pouring himself a last glass of whisky, "I'll tell you that with perseverance you can overcome the worst fate.

"Freddy, my friend, I hope you find a mammoth.

"*Ce était le filon,*" <sup>2</sup> he adds in French.

<sup>2</sup> In correct French, *C'était le filon*—French expression of double meaning; literally, "That was a vein of gold;" colloquially, "That was a piece of luck."



## XI

### THE VALLEY OF THE YUKON

THAT day Gregory Land assured me:

"You know nothing about geography. As a matter of fact, that's something that isn't learned in books.

"When the news was spread that gold was being found in the very heart of the frozen solitudes, beyond the sixtieth degree, north latitude, there was a rush.

"From the four corners of the earth, adventurers hastened to try their luck. The gold fever gripped them so firmly that they forgot the pitiless rigors of the Great North.

"The Pacific ports, from San Francisco to Vancouver,

## THE VALLEY OF THE YUKON

furnished a good part of the first immigrants; from Canada and British Columbia came the rest.

"They went up the Pacific coast from Vancouver to Skagway, through the maze of islands, in little squat steamers or in sailboats. All of them had to face the terrible currents of Prince of Wales Island, and several of them crashed against the granite rocks that crouched treacherously at the bottom of the passages.

"To-day the passages have been explored, and soundings make it possible to avoid the fatal shoals, though at spring tide the voyage is still very dangerous.

"The men who, in 1897, landed on the muddy square of Dyea or Skagway had not come to the end of their hardships.

"A few wooden shanties grouped at the foot of Pink Mountain, and a wretched landing built on piles—such was Skagway.

"To reach the gold-bearing land—the 'pay dirt,' to use the picturesque expression of the first miners—it was necessary to cross the terrible White Pass. From Skagway to White Horse it is a hundred and eleven miles, along a frightful route overhanging a chasm from eight to nine hundred feet deep.

"To-day a daring company has fastened a railway upon the peaks and crests of the basaltic rocks. By what prodigy, by what unheard-of efforts, was the will of man able

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

to assert itself? Only the hundreds of corpses of workmen, swallowed up by White Pass, could answer that question.

"In order to cross the Pass, the miners intrusted their fate either to sleds that were drawn by dogs along the trail, or to light boats that had to resist the tumult of the waters, the drop of the rapids, and the treachery of the reefs.

"Snow and glaciers; chasms suddenly opening and swallowing men, dogs, and sleds; and even forty degrees below zero—all these things could not defeat the energy of these fierce pioneers who had resolved to wrest from the mysterious land its secret.

"The Klondike craze kept up their courage. Many were those that fell, but others arrived and made a success of their adventurous performance.

"There, where nothing existed but the virgin solitude, on the banks of this Yukon, the most important and the largest of the North American rivers on the Pacific slope, arose camps which soon became cities.

"One thing is to be noted. As soon as the 'paying land' was discovered, the miners arrived, attracted by the yellow glow of the gold, as by a light; and with them these men always brought one or two dynamos. Wires were laid, and soon the landscapes of the Great North were enlivened with poles, which are, in a sense, the sym-



## THE VALLEY OF THE YUKON

bols of man's power. Telegraph, telephone, electric current—all these wires were grafted, as it were, in parallel lines upon the St. Andrews' crosses that were nailed to the tops of spruce trunks scarcely stripped of their branches.

\* \* \* \*

"The Yukon, which in summer has a terrific discharge—more than thirty-three thousand cubic yards per second—is two thousand and fifty miles long, measured from its source to the mouth of its main branch, for the Yukon forms a vast delta. It rises in the pass that bears the name of the French geodesist Périer, four thousand one hundred feet above sea level.

"Its basin bursts the official boundaries of Alaska, encroaches upon the territory of Canada, and covers an expanse of more than three hundred eighty-six thousand square miles—twice the area of your France.

"In winter, during the periods of intense cold, the river is frozen, sometimes solid, that is to say, to the bottom of its bed. In summer it is navigable to a point above its junction with the Lewes River, that is to say, for more than one thousand eight hundred and sixty miles.

"The miners blockaded at Dawson impatiently await the break-up of the river, which brings them hope for the arrival of the supply boats.

"In the mystery of these silent regions, it is like a vision



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

of Fairyland to behold the monstrous cracking that announces the thaw.

"Under the violent drive of the river, the ice breaks, the blocks strike one another, clash, and rush onward. It is like a fight between antediluvian monsters. On Lake Labarge the effect is one of grandeur; it is the plunging of the blocks all trying to pass at the same time. Woe to the boat of the unskilled pilot who, in his impatience, has ventured upon the river before the time has come!

"Beginning with its source, the river forms, in the volcanic region through which it must pass, numerous lakes that were formerly craters.

"Such is the purity of the water that the scenery is reflected in it as in a mirror. The first pioneers were struck by this fact; so 'mirror lakes' are legion in the whole valley.

"The Yukon descends the rocky slopes of the Chilkoot Mountains, and its waters flee through dark and winding canyons hemmed in by huge perpendicular walls of basaltic rock. They leap from cascade to cascade, swollen by the waters of the glacial torrents."

Gregory Land catches his breath, then goes on, in the tone of a schoolmaster:

"From the right and from the left, it receives important tributaries—the Hootalinqua, the Newberry, the Big Salmon River, the Pelly, and the Lewes; then, below the

## THE VALLEY OF THE YUKON

point where it passes through the Rockies, it receives the Stewart and the Porcupine—whose valley approaches the shore of the Arctic Ocean at an angle—the Tanana, the Cooper, and the Koyukuk, which comes from the tundras.

“At that point it attains a width of 2,700 yards. One might think that it is going to empty into Norton Sound, from which it is separated by about twenty-five miles. But no; it turns abruptly toward the southwest, then toward the west, goes north again, and finally divides into several branches that form a delta.

“The banks of the delta are constantly changing by reason of the considerable alluvial deposits, but also, and especially, on account of the erosion caused by the ice.

“The enormous blocks undermine the bank, eat it away little by little, and make it crumble into the waves.

“Sometimes, if the break-up is delayed, there are unexpected consequences. The salmon cannot go up the different branches of the river, the spawning cannot take place, and the natives suffer cruelly from hunger.”

\* \* \* \*

The mail carrier drinks a bumper and goes on:

“Dawson, which extends for more than a mile along the Yukon, is to-day an important city. It is no longer a mining camp where a certain outlaw, famous in the annals of the city, used to impose his will.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"Its numbered streets cut eight avenues at right angles, in the American way. Dawson, which, in its heroic period, boasted of its famous saloons—the *Northern*, the *Exchange*, the *Monte Carlo*—, now has churches, Catholic and Protestant, a vast post-office building that obstructs Third Avenue, and wooden sidewalks. If the city has lost some of its picturesqueness, it has certainly gained in safety.

"A few years more, and the old Yukoner, wearing mocasins of wolverine skin, with mangy furs, dressed in the indispensable overalls of coarse waterproof cloth, blue or khaki, held to the shoulders by short suspenders—the old Yukoner with fur-lined leather gloves tied above the elbows will be only a memory.

"And in the evening, at a comfortable hotel in Gold City, before a bright fire, the elegant ladies in search of a thrill, and the elegant gentlemen suffering from neurasthenia, will listen to the legendary exploits of those who, by their courage, opened the mysterious gates of the Land of Eternal Silence."

Gregory Land heaves a sigh, and to banish this depressing picture, he offers himself a double Martini cocktail.



## XII

### PUSH, A DOG OF ALASKA

"THE matter had been settled at a saloon in Dawson—the *Monte Carlo*, if you want me to be specific.

"It was at the time of the gold rush, when every day, at Skagway or Dyea, jolly fellows landed and, without waiting any longer, ascended the Yukon to take their chance.

"Some of them, the richest, bought a dog team and a sled. The rest—and this was the case with most of them—packed their slender baggage on their backs, or set out on foot.

"The capitalists had not yet accomplished that madly adventurous feat of hanging a railway upon the granite of the perpendicular rocks.

"How many comrades remained in the canyons of White

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Pass! How many ended at that place their dream of riches! The Land of Silence keeps it secret.

"But that isn't my story, and it's useless to philosophize. Only remember that those who attempted to cross the Pass and succeeded in this performance were real men.

"Hans Troemsen was one of them. He was a good-hearted, blond giant from Scandinavia, silent and grave. A fisherman by trade, he had abandoned his boat to spend his life roaming across Canada as far as British Columbia.

"In Vancouver he had heard of the discovery of the gold fields at Fairbanks and on the Tanana. If I remember rightly, that was about 1902 or 1903.

"Hans Troemsen took passage on one of the steamers that carried on the coastwise trade of the Pacific, through the maze of islands, between Vancouver and Skagway.

"He was a thrifty fellow, and managed to buy a team of six dogs—wonderful animals from Labrador, not too worn out, but broken to the trail nevertheless. He chose them with the eye of a connoisseur.

"From Skagway to White Horse it is a hundred and eleven miles over the frightful route that you know, a route overhanging a chasm eight or nine hundred feet deep.

"The team was running briskly at fifteen miles an hour, and Hans was urging on the dogs with his voice, in his somewhat guttural English. The dogs were pulling hard,

## *PUSH, A DOG OF ALASKA*

their necks forward and their hard claws gripping the ice. I must tell you that the thermometer registered 36° below zero.

"In spite of that, man and beast kept on; the sled, gliding upon its brass runners, seemed to have wings. Suddenly a cracking noise was heard. An old Yukoner, accustomed to the Pass, would have heeded this warning. Hans Troemsen did not. He was calculating his profits, his eyes straying in the distance. And then happened what was bound to happen. A block of ice—could it have been gnawed off by some invisible monster?—broke loose and fell upon the team.

"Five dogs were crushed by the blow. Hans had been thrown back against a rock by the shock, and was lying with a gash in his head.

"Such wounds are not serious if you don't die from them on the spot. And the Scandinavian had a hard skull.

"When he regained consciousness, his eyes met the kindly, bright eyes of the wheeler (the hindmost dog), who, being unhurt, was gently licking away the blood that was flowing from his master's wound.

"That hour marked the beginning of the friendship between the man and the dog.

"Hans Troemsen was fortunate in his misfortune. He was lucky enough to be met by the mail stage, which took him back home.



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"That very evening the man and the dog were in Dawson. The pioneer had lost all his baggage. All that he had left was the leather belt that he wore next to his skin, and this belt still contained a few bright dollars.

"Now I'm coming to my story. So, as I was telling you, the matter had been settled in one of the saloons of Dawson, the *Monte Carlo*.

"You mustn't think that the Dawson of 1902 was like the city of to-day. But how much more picturesque it was!

"Naturally, we had had saloons before we had a church. We had the *Bank*, the *Exchange*, the *Northern*, the *Savoy*, and especially the *Monte Carlo*, where, for one dollar, we were entitled to taste the delights of the waltz in the arms of a dancing girl. It's true that we paid two dollars for a cocktail. Well, the land paid in those days, and the gold dust seemed to flow through our fingers like the water in the sluice boxes. Happy times, all the same!

"Excuse me; I am carried away by my memories. One evening, then, at the *Monte Carlo*, we saw Hans Troensen come in, followed by his inseparable dog Push. The entrance of the good-hearted giant caused a sensation. As a matter of fact, the Scandinavian never crossed the threshold of the saloon. He was accompanied by Ralph Harrison, a bad fellow, a hard drinker, and a woman chaser.

## *PUSH, A DOG OF ALASKA*

" 'Jesus and the wicked thief,' said James W. Bilt aloud.

"There was an outburst of laughter. Ralph disregarded the insult. The two companions sat down at a table that stood apart from the others. The mechanical orchestra struck up a polka. We danced, and gave no further heed to the two men.

"While we were dancing, a bargain was being concluded. Hans Troemsen was buying on a chance—that is to say, with no other information than the word of the seller—a creek that was a journey of twenty days from Dawson, in the direction of Rupert City, on the Tahkeena.

"They had been finding pay over there in considerable quantities, and the land was being hastily bought up at a high price.

"At the moment of settling, Hans, who was a practical and cautious fellow, gave only a third of the amount, promising to pay the remainder upon reaching the place in question.

"Ralph appeared satisfied, pocketed the dollars, and promised to guide the new owner himself. They were to set out the next day.

"Hans Troemsen went out, with Push at his heels; and Ralph, who was the most desperate gambler on earth, began a game of faro with some rusher.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"At a hundred ounces of gold a point, Ralph, who had no luck, was stripped in short order.

"The next day, nevertheless, he hitched his team and set out with Hans Troemsen, preceded by Push, out of harness and yelping at the head of the pack.

\* \* \* \*

"Two days later, in that same *Monte Carlo*, we saw Ralph Harrison return. He was alone and had an enormous bandage around his head. His right wrist also was wrapped in a dressing.

"He told what had happened. Hans Troemsen had wanted to drive the team in the Indian way. Unaccustomed to it, the Scandinavian, while taking a turn, had not been able to gather the reins quickly enough, and the team had fallen into a ravine. He, Ralph, had foreseen the fall. Standing up on the taku, he had jumped just in time; while dogs, man, and sled crashed into the abyss.

"Ralph's skull was slightly bruised, but as tough as ever. A team that was returning to Dawson had fortunately taken him back to the city.

"Such accidents happened every day. No one was moved to pity by the sad end of Hans, and since Ralph was buying drinks for the whole company, he was proclaimed the best of fellows.

"He had a glass in his hand—I tell you, I can see him as clearly as if it had happened yesterday—and he had

*PUSH, A DOG OF ALASKA*

his elbow upon the wood of the bar, holding the glass with his left hand. He was gazing at the liquor, which he kept at the level of his eye, and he was laughing with a laughter that disclosed a double row of white teeth, sharp as those of a wolf. He was drinking and laughing, and the girls found him handsome, with his somewhat pale face in its linen bandage.

"He was about to drink the health of the company, when a bristling object rushed in.

"From the door to the bar it was about fifteen feet. In one leap the distance was covered. The drinkers stopped. The object, a dog, set up a long howl of distress in front of Ralph.

" 'It's Push,' said some one.

" 'Push?'

" 'Yes, Push, the Norwegian's dog.'

"Push, happy to be recognized, stopped his barking and wagged his tail. Then he began a strange maneuver; he went about from one to another, whining, and genuine tears veiled his eyes. Whenever he stopped in front of Ralph, his barking became hoarse and furious.

"Ralph appeared unconcerned, and attempted to drive the dog away with a kick. But the beast rushed at him in a fury. James W. Bilt stopped him in the air by seizing his collar.

"With a friendly pat he quieted Push, and, advancing toward Harrison, he said to him:

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

" 'Is that your friend's dog?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'Then he didn't fall into the ravine?'

" 'I don't know . . . I thought so . . . in any case. . . .'

" 'Oh!'

"With a quick jerk James W. Bilt had removed the dressing. Ralph's head appeared untouched, with no trace of a wound.

"Seeing himself unmasked, the bandit made a move toward his belt; but he could not finish it, for twenty fists had come down upon him.

"Straightway three men set out, guided by Push. They followed the trail as far as the Yukon. At that point it turned northward. A day's journey away, they discovered that the trail had been abandoned for a new one.

"Three miles from the starting point, in a lonely gorge, Push set up a frantic whining and kept scratching the hardened snow with his paws. They cleared the spot and found, first the bodies of the dogs, frozen stiff, then the body of Hans Troemsen, who had ended there his career as a gold seeker.

"Since he had a distinct bullet mark between his shoulder blades, the three men went back to Dawson.

"In those days justice did not bother with inquests and useless red tape. Furthermore, Ralph had confessed.

"He had broken the law of the North; he would be

*PUSH, A DOG OF ALASKA*

hanged. That was bound to happen, sooner or later, to a fellow like Ralph. He was not moved by the sentence. He had lost, and he would pay.

"They took him a short distance outside the city, opposite the Yukon. At that place there was a willow that was quite convenient for the use to which it was put.

"The prisoner was brought forward; but as James W. Bilt was reading the sentence, Push rushed upon his master's murderer and opened his throat with a single rip. It was accurate, swift; and no one had time to intervene.

"But since Ralph had been condemned to be hanged, even though he was dead, they hanged him just the same. For the law must always take its course. Thus it must be in all things."





### XIII

#### THE MACHINE FOR MAKING DOLLARS

"JACK Nichols? That's another chap whose leading strings I have held."

"You've been a wet nurse, Gregory?"

"You're crazy."

"So are you."

"Thanks. I'll proceed."

And Gregory Land braces himself in his cushions. Feeling that a story is coming, I resign myself to it and pretend to be absorbed in shaping a pair of trousers that I

## THE MACHINE FOR MAKING DOLLARS

am trying to cut out of a moose hide, a wonderful hide, brown and white—a real charm.

It is a delicate piece of work, since I have no scissors and am using my hunting knife.

The blade is not sharp enough to suit me, and I draw it several times over the whetstone.

This is not to the liking of the mail carrier.

"Young man, you're setting my teeth on edge."

"I'm sorry."

"If you keep that up, you won't hear the rest of the story."

"Gregory, old pal, you have no more intention of keeping still than I have of crossing Lake Labarge with bare feet."

"I'll be damned if you'll hear the end."

Having finished the cutting of my hide, I place myself in a crouching position in front of the crackling hearth, take out my needle, and begin to sew.

A silence.

Gregory fidgets on his chair. His leg is still in a sorry state. He groans.

With a uniform movement, I keep sewing. Gregory, with his nervous fingers, plays a march on the table.

I hum an accompaniment.

The mail carrier grumbles:

"You have no more heart than a polar bear; and even

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

that animal has the family instinct. For instance, one day. . . .”

And behold, Gregory has started on another adventure. I cannot restrain my laughter.

But as he moves his sore leg in an alarming way, I have fears for the bandage.

“Come, old fellow, I’m joking. Go on and tell that story of yours.”

“You shan’t hear a darn word of it.”

I smile, and thread my needle attentively. Scarcely is this operation finished, when he begins:

“I’ll tell it to you just the same, because it may serve you as an example.

“Jack Nichols—I saw him land at the camp in Caribou. I liked him, that fellow with his glasses. He was as shy as a girl and as gentle as a lamb. On seeing him, I said to myself: ‘There’s one that won’t last long here, unless somebody takes care of him.’

“At that time I had the philanthropic disease, a disease which fortunately has left me!

“I adopt this fellow. I take him under my wing, which is a figurative way of speaking, and I introduce him to my comrades. I take him myself to the government engineer and have him buy a good piece of land, believe me.

“The poor chap didn’t know a darn thing. But he was willing to learn.

## THE MACHINE FOR MAKING DOLLARS

"I taught him, first of all, to recognize a gold-bearing spot. That wasn't easy. He would get lost in my explanations, but God endowed me with wonderful patience."

I smile again.

The patient man becomes angry.

"Don't get excited, friend Gregory; I'm listening to your course in natural history."

"You certainly need it; you're nothing but a greenhorn."

I do not blink an eye.

Gregory is astonished, and repeats:

"I said that you were nothing but a greenhorn."

With a phlegm that is quite British, I reply:

"That's right."

"Yes, Jack couldn't recognize a vein of quartz. I taught him how to do it. I showed him the vein cutting through the metamorphic rocks, which are, as you know, or rather as you don't know, usually clay schists——"

I interrupt him in the tone of a schoolboy reciting his lesson:

"——Clay schists, talc schists, chlorite schists, of a greenish or grayish color. Sometimes it is also found in porphyritic rocks, in gneisses, and rarely in granite. . . ."

I catch my breath. Gregory stops me with a gesture, winks his eye, and says:

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"All right!"

Then, a little presumptuously, he adds:

"I've made a good student out of you.

"Jack couldn't understand that there might be gold in this quartz conglomerate that served as veinstone.

"Gold! The sunshine of our bearded old alchemists! Gold! The possibility of satisfying one's desire! Gold! Prestige, the power to. . . . What annoying beasts men are!

"The one that I am speaking of was really discovering the world. In some respects, he was as innocent as a child. You should have seen his joy when, in the bottom of the pan in which he was washing the sand, he saw, for the first time, small shining grains. He was so pleased that he wept.

"For hours he remained gazing at his pay, his eyes fixed, and his hands trembling. One would have said that he saw something as in a mirror.

"I helped him build his first sluice box and his first inclined channel, a hundred feet long.

"I explained to him why it was necessary to provide the bottom with wooden riffles and grooves, and why mercury was placed in these grooves.

"He didn't know, poor fellow, that gold has the property of uniting itself with mercury and that under these conditions it is easier to separate it from the grains of sand.

## THE MACHINE FOR MAKING DOLLARS

"Courage? He had it, in spite of his puny appearance; and bravely he threw the material into the top of the box.

"He handled his shovel with ardor. Sometimes he would stop, and then I would catch the same fixity in his eyes. He always seemed to be looking farther away, into life. . . . Then he would sigh, spit on his hands, and take up his tool again.

"He had an astonishing power of endurance. Sometimes he washed eighteen tons of sand in one day!

"The water that ran into the sluice box seemed to keep up his courage. At times he would stop and amuse himself by plunging his hand into the water that flowed, without stopping, between his fingers, swift and elusive.

"I had said: 'Before three months are up, there's a man who will pack his baggage and take the road to Dawson with no expectation of returning.'

"The months passed, but the man held out. I went away. After a long trip I found him again, still passionately at work, toiling like a hireling. And at the same time he was as serious as a minister—never at the saloon, never taking a good swallow of whisky that knocks you out, never holding a card between his fingers.

"He had taken a liking to his trade. The joy that he experienced while washing his pay he found again while watching his amalgamating apparatus, as it turned with a rhythmic motion. Fondly he watched over his rocker,



## *THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE*

which was suspended like a child's cradle, covered with its grate and with a coarse canvas screen at its bottom.

"The gold-bearing sand deposited on the grate, under the double influence of the rotation and the water, gave up its finer particles, which were sifted little by little, and left only the nuggets on the cloth, gold being eighteen times heavier than water.

"With what rapture he would gather up his pay, then put it away in little leather bags!

"One day I caught him listening to the frightful din of the stamp mill, as if it were a kind of heavenly music. The jaws of the crushers ate the quartz like gluttonous beasts; and the ore disappeared as, in ancient times, must have disappeared the victims offered to Baal or to Moloch.

"The conveyers brought the material, the five stamps worked in turn, raised by the cast-iron cams, whose shaft was supported by a wooden structure.

"The stamps came down with a rotating motion, crushing the ore.

"I swear that this infernal noise was soothing to the soul of that man.

"The basest greed could be clearly read on his face. That frail, short-sighted, and gentle man had the face of a demon as he scraped, with rubber scrapers, the surface of the copper plates that had retained the gold.

"Gold . . . gold . . . gold. . . .

## THE MACHINE FOR MAKING DOLLARS

"That was the only song that the machine for making dollars sang to him."

Gregory pauses for a moment, then says:

"Jack Nichols disgusts me; he's a filthy miser."

And to prove his disgust, the mail carrier spits over my head, into the fire.

\* \* \* \*

"Is that all of your story?"

Gregory looks at me, dumbfounded.

"Well, it seems to me——"

"It seems to me, o psychologist, o despiser of mankind, o this and o that—it seems to me that you are a stupid ass."

"What do you say?"

"I say that, with all your philosophy, you are nothing but a fool. Keep your leg still, will you? You keep fidgeting like a demon, and all night you'll be groaning like a weakling."

Never have I treated my friend so brutally. He is petrified by it, and contents himself with exclaiming, when he can put in a word:

"Well! Well!"

"Well, I have said that you were a poor psychologist, and I'm going to prove it. As for your story, I'm the one who is going to finish it."

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"The story about Jack Nichols?"

"Yes, Jack Nichols. I knew him. We were neighbors; his placer was next to mine on the Tanana. And, if that can give you any satisfaction, you heartless mail carrier, I'll tell you that I closed that fellow's eyes. And if there is justice anywhere, in a paradise, Jack Nichols has a place among those who have suffered the torture of this life.

"He died a frightful death. It was an every-day accident—a block of stone had crushed both his legs. But this agony was nothing in comparison with that which he had suffered for months and months under the Arctic Circle.

"He was in the clutches of a fever. His mind was wandering, and I learned. . . . I learned of the life of self-denial and courage of that man who was born for a peaceful existence, in the quiet of his study, amidst the friendly shadow of his beloved books and the rare knick-knacks that he had managed to bring together with jealous care.

"But a woman passes and throws everything into confusion. Like a gust of wind, her skirt upsets his finest plans. Life is mean and commonplace; but the newspapers are bringing in reports of the astounding success of adventurers.

"Gold, the giver of fortune, is there for the mere

## THE MACHINE FOR MAKING DOLLARS

trouble of taking it. But to take it, one must also go and look for it.

"The pretty doll with the small brain wishes to be as beautiful and as well adorned as her friends. She is going to drag out her miserable existence, in the expectation of what? A doubtful success, after twenty years.

"Quarrels arise and mar this beautiful love:

" 'You're nothing but a chicken-hearted coward.'

" 'You're nothing but a lazy dormouse.'

" 'You've got about as much courage as a hare.'

"At last, one evening, comes the ultimatum. The doll is going away to test her charms. Since he is bound to lose her in any case, isn't it better to show her that he is a man?

"In the morning, without stopping to reason any longer, he sets out, reading in the porcelain eyes a little love and much joy.

"And when Jack Nichols lands, you meet him and you help him. He often told me how grateful he was to you and how much he suffered from your absence.

"You were saying that this apprentice gold seeker used to stare 'into life.' Yes, by God! When you used to see him leaning over his pan, it wasn't the nuggets that he was gazing at, but the image of his beloved doll appearing with a smile, while the spangles of gold animated her eyes that seemed so far away.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"He would remain leaning on his shovel, his nerves racked with fatigue, weary to the point of dropping. Yonder, beyond the hills and the miles of snow, in the big city, was a fragile doll waiting for happiness to come to her. And he alone could give her this happiness, by dint of toil and suffering. Up and at it! He would spit on his hands and start once more the machine for making dollars.

"I don't mean your blind crushers and your soulless apparatus that by their ingenuity tear from the earth the 'sovereign lord gold.' The machine for making dollars was that man, that puny creature who, in a frightful climate, worked and worked in order that the doll might be merry and have new finery to enhance her beauty.

"And the sacrifice was in vain.

"The gold that is torn from the earth is harder to find than the gold that circulates in the big city.

"You didn't notice the face of your 'miser' when, on three occasions, you went to the camp and did not once have in your leather sack the usual letter for him—the blue envelope on which one read, in large, freakish letters, the name of Jack Nichols.

"The letters came to an end. He received no more. But hope kept bright his lover's heart; and after a period of cruel despair, he would become himself again. The machine for making dollars once more would go to work,

## *THE MACHINE FOR MAKING DOLLARS*

moving continuously, and with that obstinacy, that stubbornness, that is the strength of the weak.

"He died when the polar night was under the spell of the Northern Lights. He passed away gently, his eyes opened wide upon his dream, with a woman's name upon his lips."

Gregory Land simply said:

"You are right, friend. I certainly am a stupid ass."





## XIV

### A FAMOUS FISHING TRIP

WHEN the day's work is done, we go to the saloon, where, amidst the tumult of the shouting, the smoke from the pipes, the blatant sound of the phonographs, and the wail of the accordions, we let our thoughts drift toward things that are far away.

We drink to sustain our broken bodies; we drink to forget our former sorrows; but, above all, we drink for the sake of drinking.

With both elbows on the bar and a straw between my lips, I am drinking.

A voice addresses me:

"Well, my boy, what about your fishing trip?"

## *A FAMOUS FISHING TRIP*

"My fishing trip? You'd better say my hunting trip."

"Your hunting trip! I'm certainly astonished to hear that. Didn't I see you set out with a complete outfit at your side? You were going, you assured me, to fish for trout in the mountain streams of the Rockies."

"To fish for trout, certainly; and we brought back the carcass of a magnificent grizzly."

"A grizzly?"

"Yes, a wonderful beast, seven feet eleven inches tall, to be exact."

"That's a queer story. Waiter, two whiskies."

"The thing is very simple. It was like this. We had set out, Lewis W. Gould and I, to fish for trout, the beautiful salmon trout. We had just baited our lines, when a trapper came down on the run. 'I've picked up,' he said, 'the tracks of a grizzly in the mountain, two miles from here. If you want to kill him, I'll share the job with you.'

" 'It would be great fun to kill a grizzly with our fishing poles,' was the cold answer of Lewis W. Gould.

" 'Don't let that stand in the way; I have two Winchester's to offer you.'

"My comrade turns toward me.

" 'Partner, how would you like to go bear hunting after coming to fish?'

" 'All right!'

" 'Good!'

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"Methodically Lewis W. Gould folds up his fishing tackle and, addressing the trapper, says:

" 'We'll follow you.'

"Over a winding trail, we climb the mountain, quite astonished to find ourselves, after walking a mile and a half, before the spot that we had left, but three hundred feet higher up.

"The hut—a hut of spruce logs—was built in accordance with the right principles, the chinks being filled with clay. The Winchesters are in good condition. Lewis W. Gould examines them attentively. The examination is satisfactory, for he simply says:

" 'Let's go!'

"We follow a narrow path bordered by gigantic pines; but I haven't time to be moved by the sight of 'the oldest living things on earth,' as the Yankees say. Already our guide is pointing out to us unmistakable bear tracks.

"To tell the truth, I must admit that I had found the path like any other path. But evidently that is not the opinion of Lewis W. Gould, who nods his head and says:

" 'It's a big beast.'

"I was soon to know how big it was.

"The trees were coming to an end, and the heaps of rocks formed a gorge of scanty width; while below could be heard the roaring of the torrent, choked by the excessive narrowness of the pass.

## *A FAMOUS FISHING TRIP*

"Once we were through the gorge, the vegetation began again; and fifty feet away, in front of us, we saw one of the finest bears ever sheltered by the Rocky Mountains.

"He was really more surprised than we were. But he continued to advance, swaying his enormous head from right to left with the regularity of a metronome.

" 'Do you want to shoot him, friend?'

"The invitation is addressed to me.

"I take aim, fire, and . . . I miss the beast, in spite of the fact that it is, as you will remember, a big one. A smile of pity appears on the face of Lewis W. Gould. He fires two shots, and the beast sinks without a cry. It only opens its claws like a fan, then closes them almost immediately, uprooting with a single embrace a spruce tree of three years' growth.

"At my place you can see its skin, which is a very fine one. The hair is long and not injured in the least. It was a full-grown animal."

"That certainly was a famous 'fishing trip,' " approves my friend, tossing the contents of his whisky glass into his throat with a single gulp.



## XV

### A WONDERFUL HUNTING PARTY

THIS evening I am the one who is talking.

Gregory is in a grouchy mood, and for a good reason; there is no tobacco.

He sucks his empty pipe to beguile his craving and to fool himself.

I say to him:

"You know Seattle?"

The mail carrier shrugs his shoulders.

"Of course!"

I go on, speaking more to myself than to him, trying to delude my melancholy. I am recollecting aloud.

\* \* \* \*



## A WONDERFUL HUNTING PARTY

We are in the rear of a saloon in Seattle, in the State of Washington, where, in spite of prohibitions, they run through the whole scale of alcoholic drinks—from the gin of Scotland to the *grappa* of Italy, *via* the cognac of France. The room is full of jolly fellows—seamen from the seas of the Pacific, coastwise sailors from Europe, who have passed the Strait of Magellan and followed the coast northward as far as Vancouver.

They speak every language, or rather the slang of every language. It is slang that predominates, from the guttural calls of the olive-complexioned Chileans to the lisping of Chinamen with almond eyes and faces wrinkled like hens' feet.

The Malaysians are chewing betel, and the Yankees are chewing gum. Two sailors, a Basque and a man from Marseilles, are smoking cigarettes—the first silently and gravely, the second with quick and jerky puffs.

There are sailors from Uncle Sam's Navy, with trousers like elephants' legs and hats like sea biscuits. All have their necks exposed, sinewy and muscular; and when they raise their heads, a strip of duller skin is seen.

Miners who have come down from the Klondike are playing faro. According to their custom, they are weighing their stake—a quantity of gold dust—on a diminutive pair of scales.

Harry Flink, the British bartender, impeccable in his



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

white coat, pours out the drinks with a quick movement. A young chap fifteen years old—an Italian with eyes like a woman's—is shaking vigorously the machine for making cocktails.

There is a continuous stir. Men enter, drink, pay, and go out; while others arrive and do likewise. Here you don't go to the saloon to talk, but merely to drink. All things must be put to the use for which they were intended. A saloon is a place for drinking, so there you drink.

A chap from the East hums: *All the nice girls love the sailors*, orders a whisky, then throws two nickels on the wooden bar. The cash register rings, and before its drawer is closed again, the fellow is outside and his refrain is dying away in the street.

"Hello, boy!"

A rough clap comes down upon my shoulder. It is my friend Lewis W. Gould. I recognize his manner.

"Har you?" he mumbles between his teeth; and, without waiting for my answer, he adds: "Me? I'm perfectly all right."

In fact, I have rarely seen a man carry his whisky better. To prove that he is all right, he calls to the bartender: "A whisky for me." And, with a grimace of pity, he adds: "A glass of beer for this gentleman."

"Here's to your love."

"And here's to yours."

## *A WONDERFUL HUNTING PARTY*

Raising his glass to the level of his eye, he drains the alcohol with one swallow.

Giving vent to an "Ah!" of satisfaction, and resting his elbows on the bar, he says:

"So you've come back from hunting the grizzly, have you?"

"Why, yes, I have."

"Do you want to go hunting to-night?"

"To-night?"

"Perhaps. If you say the word, we'll go out and get on board."

"Oh, we're going on board! Are we going to hunt seals, then?"

"No," answers Lewis W. Gould phlegmatically. "Not seals, but Chinamen."

"Huh? What did you say?"

"Just what I said—Chinamen."

"Is it an animal that you call by that name?"

"No, no. I'm using the correct term. Not a Chinese beast, but a beast of a Chinaman. . . . It's all the same," he adds with a coarse laugh.

His laughter embarrasses me and perplexes me at the same time. I have seen so many strange things in this strange America. I don't know whether to take my friend's proposition seriously.

But he concludes, imperturbably:

"It's something very exciting."

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

If a thing is exciting, it's the acme of excellence for an American.

"Are you coming along?"

I hesitate. But Lewis W. Gould adds:

"Flossie Hurchisson will be there."

"Oh! In that case, if Flossie Hurchisson is to be there, all right, I accept."

"Say, partner, not so fast! Just like a Frenchman! You don't want to, and then, when you do want to, you want to right away. Bartender . . . a whisky for me."

With a touch of irony, I add:

"And a glass of beer for me."

"No!" says Lewis W. Gould, correcting me. "A glass of whisky for you too. It's going to be a bad night. Nothing like whisky for the sea fog."

We swallow the whiskies and go out. Against the clear night sky, the tall, silent buildings outline their huge bulk. The street lamps, with their eight globes, throw a sheet of light upon the street, where only a few groups of straggling sailors are to be seen.

The Totem Pole raises its hieratic form in the middle of Pioneer Square.

\* \* \* \*

The floats . . . the wharf. . . .

Three motorboats bearing on their sides the word

## A WONDERFUL HUNTING PARTY

POLICE in brown capital letters are lying alongside, like sleeping beasts.

"Flossie Hurchisson?"

"Here," cries a clear voice.

"All right!"

The chief of police, who is the manager of the expedition, after the customary greetings, asks us to come aboard.

My friend Lewis W. Gould gets into the boat of the assistant chief.

By George! We're not any too comfortable, to use one of Lewis's expressions; these damned motorboats haven't a very wide cockpit. Finally, we manage to squeeze in, Flossie quite close to me.

She is very comfortable, Flossie is. My right side is pressed a little too tightly against the coaming, but next to a pretty woman. . . .

The chief—a tall, clean-shaven man—raises his left arm and brings it down. It is the signal. The slumbering beasts awaken . . . the motors hum . . . we are off.

"Good luck to you," cries the voice of Lewis W. Gould, whose boat takes the lead.

"Thanks," answers Flossie, muffling herself up in a huge robe made of foxskins sewed together.

Over the surface of the water we skim past gigantic

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

steamers. The moon tears through a veil of clouds and risks one eye. Its reflection dances upon the waves.

"Damn that moon!" swears the chief of police.

As for me, I find it divine, that blond moon which enhances the beauty of the still blonder neck of my neighbor. Seated a little farther back, I look at this woman's profile—that plump neck over which passes a slight shudder. She must have understood that I am looking at her, for she turns round quickly and smiles at me. That smile, opening wide the mouth, shows me a row of firm teeth. I find that she has a smile that reminds me somewhat of a wild beast, this pretty Flossie Hurchisson.

We have crossed the outer harbor, and the eye of the lighthouse is following us. Here we are, going up the broad estuary formed by the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Leaving Vancouver Island on our starboard, we maneuver in sight of the lights of Victoria, but refrain from entering English waters.

That is British Columbia. Let us not forget that we are, for the moment, American policemen.

It appears that we are out for a hunt. It must be true, for I read on the face of the chief of police all the disappointment of the hunter who is tortured by the fear of returning empty-handed.

One *damn* succeeds another in his mouth.

## A WONDERFUL HUNTING PARTY

*Damn* is applied to the cursed game that will not let itself be killed, or even caught.

A question from Flossie causes our manager's disappointment to explode.

"Can't you find anything, dear? My, this is not interesting at all!"

He answers with a rudeness that is quite American:

"Say, madam, do you think this is a snap? . . . And yet, I've got accurate information. But how the Hell can you make out anything with such a sky as this, and this motor that makes such a devil of a noise? I'm sure they can hear us ten miles from here."

For two long hours we have been turning in a circle. The other boats are out of sight, lost out there on the vast expanse of water.

Being less sheltered by the coast, we are caught on the quarter by a wind from north-northeast, which drives us out to sea and accelerates our speed.

"It's none too warm here," murmurs our pretty companion with a pout, wrapping herself snugly in her fox skins.

Suddenly the air is rent by three short whistles, shrill and strident.

The signal!

The animal is in sight. A longer blast warns us that we must keep a lookout on our port.



## *THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE*

A command from the chief. The obedient boat turns and gathers speed.

Flossie Hurchisson utters a curious "Oh!" She throws back her robe and cranes her neck.

"Faster, faster!" orders the chief of police, standing up and peering with eager eyes.

"Oh! Over there, I see. . . ."

I open wide my eyes, but in vain.

Two short blasts, a pause, and a third blast.

"Change your course; head them off."

These two orders are executed with military promptness.

Over there, over there. . . . Holding out his finger, the chief shows me a point that I finally make out. It is a sailing vessel, which seems to grow larger as it emerges from the waves.

Another command.

"What! We're giving up the chase?" asks Flossie Hurchisson regretfully.

"No, we're heading off those damned beasts before they reach British waters."

The blasts succeed one another, talking back and forth in the night. A longer cry . . . then the whistle gives forth a continuous wail. It is the cry of victory.

We have headed them off. The three boats form an arc of a circle. The prey cannot escape. We slacken speed. The boats dance upon the waves. The sailing vessel—a Chinese junk with a rectangular sail—is there,

## A WONDERFUL HUNTING PARTY

half a mile away. A few hums from the motor, and we shall be upon it.

The moon has burst through its girdle of clouds. Amused and mocking, it looks down upon this picture. The junk tacks and dodges again, trying to pass through the meshes of the net that is drawn tighter and tighter.

Distinctly we see the sailors running upon the deck. Suddenly the chief of police lets out a terrible oath. A command rings out on the junk. The men form a group, raise a chest, and throw it overboard, repeating the operation four times.

I don't understand. The chief is swearing like a demon. I look at my neighbor and see that her eyes are flashing like blades of steel. They are glowing with fire. Her lips are tense, her nostrils contracted. There is something of a shewolf in that physiognomy. She feels that I am observing her.

In Flossie the lady reappears with her unchanging smile, as she says:

"Oh! Very exciting!"

\* \* \* \*

This time we are the ones that give the commands. A short whistle, a longer whistle, and the three boats sheer off. We turn our backs upon the junk, which soon grows smaller and smaller, and is lost in the ocean.

"I don't understand. . . ."

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

Then Flossie Hurchisson obligingly explains:

"The hunt is over."

"The hunt?"

"I'll explain it to you, man of little understanding. The American laws forbidding the entry of Chinamen into the territory of the Union are very strict. So these cursed beasts resort to tricks to get across the border. The easiest route, because it is the hardest to watch, is the sea. That's why smuggling by sea is more important."

"But then. . . ."

"Then the Chinamen shut themselves up in chests, and the sailors from their country land them on the sand. That's all."

"That's all!"

"Unless," continues pretty Mrs. Hurchisson, with an ambiguous smile, "unless they chase them, as we have done this evening."

"Then what about the chests that they threw overboard?"

"They did that in order not to be punished. The law is strict, I told you."

"But what was in the chests?"

"In each chest there was a Chinaman. What difference does that make?"

Really, it was a wonderful hunting party.



## XVI

### IN THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT

I AM alone, this evening, in my hut. My dogs are sleeping outside. I am alone with Tempest, who is rolled up like a ball before the blazing fireplace.

The day has been a hard but healthy one. I feel happy. My body is weary, but my mind is at ease.

Shall I open a book? What's the use? The latest paper I have is two months old; and besides, what do I care about this old news? Between the civilized world and me there are thousands of miles. The nearest camp—where people are living the same life as I—is a journey of three days, toward the southeast.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

What rapture it is to be an unknown creature, lost in the immense totality of things!

The polar night surrounds me, and I relish the quiet joy of being alone.

The snow no longer softly falls upon the soft snow.

There is not the slightest vibration; there are no living things except my dogs and me.

In the clear sky the stars are wandering through their unchanging cycle.

Before me there is nothing—only Nature raising the bristling snow field, terrible in its virginity. Those in search of the highway have passed farther to the east. Guard your secret, my beloved country, keep it from the curiosity of men!

And yet, it is the very best that have come to you—the hearts exalted with the thought that they were serving a cause, and the fierce hearts that followed from mere love of adventure.

They gave themselves to you, and you gave yourself to them. You took them in your irresistible embrace, not knowing that you were crushing out their lives. Carrying out the task of inexorable destiny, your ice floes that held their ship prisoner tightened their grip, twisting and smashing everything—wood, iron, and steel—and wiping out the evidence of man's audacity. Nothing survived save a few creatures who wandered a few days longer,

## IN THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT

and then were laid low by mental torture and discouragement, foes more deadly than hunger and cold.

Snow filled the sunken eyelids; then a second snowfall leveled everything. And once more the Great North returned to the white silence that has guarded it since the first ages of the earth.

\* \* \* \*

This silence has come down from the mysterious North. There is peace in my heart, in my senses, and in my brain.

Only the Beast is alive within me, and this evening the Beast is happy to be alone in the immense heart of the northern forest.

There is not the slightest vibration. I am the only living thing. What a mistake! Life still pursues its invisible journey. Everything is in vibration. Everything thrills around me.

The thousand noises of the forest reach my ears—the cracking of the dry wood as it breaks off and falls, and the rustling of the branches. Millions of pine needles mingle together, and the cones drop with a soft sound.

As in the fantastic vision of Shakespeare, the forest stirs, moves, walks, and approaches; while the immense shadow stretches obliquely across the white earth.

The roots probe the soil, seeking the primeval strata;



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

while the invigorating sap rises into the soul of the trees, and the trees grow taller and taller in their effort to reach the clouds.

The song of the wind passes through the branches. It is a song as old as the world, a song in which the wind, condemned to eternal wandering, complains that he is never at rest. He implores his friends, the trees, hangs upon their boughs, makes a bouquet of leaves, then soon tires of it and throws it away, to go and roar like a pipe organ under the lofty vaults of the sequoias. Sending down his plaint to the humblest shoots, he caresses the saxifrage and the lichens, strikes against the pointed rocks, and then moves on, carrying away his grief and bewailing his suffering.

And the beasts of the forest awaken, one by one. My ear recognizes the cry of the slant-eyed lynx, watching his prey with legs drawn up, his ears erect and listening.

The tiger-cat beguiles his impatience by planting his claws in the branch that supports him. His nose is wrinkled, and his ears are lowered.

Slinking away with drooping tails, the foxes pass—gray, silver, black, tawny red, and pinkish white. Then come the aristocrats—blue and white—who go from Labrador to Behring Sea, displaying their rare furs. Their snouts are broad and short, and they trot upon their short

## IN THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT

legs. Twice a year they shed their fur. White in winter, they turn, in summer, to a deep blond, with purple reflections.

Suddenly seized with fright, they crouch down. The terrible army of wolves is advancing.

The large polar wolves with soft fur, black or gray, prowl about, lean and sinewy—ears erect, mouths open, seeking to appease the frightful hunger that gnaws at their vitals. Now and then they stop, with eyes shining, one paw in the air, and nose pointing straight upward to catch the wind. At a signal from the leader, the troop is off again, eager and prompt.

I recognize the teeth of the badger and the skunk, nibbling the bark of the trees. But the marten wants his share—the nimble-bodied marten, proud of his golden fur. The peaceful badger leaves the place, but the stinking skunk remains. It is Mr. Marten that withdraws in disgust.

A sharp cry. The quarrelsome ermine is fighting. He has surprised a mink, and his sharp teeth sink into the poor animal's neck. . . . A veil covers the little round eyes, the thin legs are drawn up, the tail moves two or three times, a prolonged quiver passes over the body . . . the mink is dead. A few tiny drops of blood soil the ermine's beautiful coat.

Those rustling noises come from the muskrats below

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

and from the squirrels above—the gray squirrels with short, pointed ears and a tail like a plume.

*Patak, patak, patak, float, float, float.* Here are the wolves, coming back and pursuing their hungry patrol.

A bark, and the troop stops, panting. From the distance comes a noise that grows louder and louder. One hears a *clock, clock, clock* that is full of meaning. It is the large reindeer, here known as the caribou, who dislocates his kneecap as he walks, producing the sharp noise that the wolves know so well. If the *clock, clock, clock* is repeated, it means that the herd is a large one, and then the wolves keep away. If it is not repeated, the hunt begins. The caribou flee, the females and the young in the middle, the males guarding the flanks and the rear. It is a desperate flight over the white plain, as the wolves follow with snapping jaws. In despair, the males stand at bay. It is an epic struggle. The wolves attack in a semicircle, while the caribou defends himself—not with his antlers, but with his knees and his feet. Woe to the wolf who is too imprudent! With his head shattered, he is sent rolling over the snow. But usually the wolves rush all together upon their prey. The caribou bends his legs and falls. He is doomed. But his death ransoms the life of the others, who flee as the wolves rush upon the warm quarry.

To-night I shall not hear the prolonged bellow of dis-

## *IN THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT*

trous— that long, pitiful cry that rises from the plain to the forest and makes the beasts shudder with fear. The caribou are in force and pass on with their hammering gallop; while, on the opposite trail, the wolves pursue their inscrutable destiny.



## XVII

### THE DAMNATION OF FAUST

TIRED of chewing tobacco, Gregory Land takes out a short clay pipe, cleans it carefully with the aid of a match, strikes it with sharp little taps upon the wood of the table, then asks me for my box of mixture.

"You have excellent tobacco, old boy. That's a sign of a clear conscience. Bad fellows like me never have tobacco, and smoke that of other people. Don't protest. I know myself better than you, I think. The proof is [here Gregory assumes a sorrowful tone] that I who am speaking to you refused to give a pinch of tobacco to a man who was about to die."

"Oh!"

## THE DAMNATION OF FAUST

"I mean just what I say. It was in the saloon at Rupert City. I was warming myself, with my back to the stove, and watching two honorable gentlemen who were gambling. It was a close game, and the stake was considerable. One of them kept winning with astonishing persistence. He had a twinkle in his eye and, at the corner of his mouth, that mocking crease that looks like pity, but is merely insolence. Two parallel wrinkles furrowed the forehead of his partner, and, in the lower part of his cheeks, two other wrinkles put his mouth in parenthesis, as it were.

"This second man takes the dice box with a nervous gesture, and throws the dice. Four kings. His companion seizes the leather cup, places in it the ivory cubes one by one, with great care, like a man who is in no hurry.

"He shakes the box, appears to be interested in the noise of the imprisoned dice, then stops, looks at me, and says: 'Do you happen to have a pipeful of tobacco, sir?'

"He was getting on my nerves, that fellow, with his conceited air. In a gruff tone, I answer: 'I'm sorry. . . .' 'Never mind,' he says. 'Thanks just the same.'

"He shakes the rattling dice, and at last decides to send them rolling over the table. Four aces.

"He had won again. But just as he was picking up his earnings, the other sent a bullet into his belly. He didn't



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

utter a single cry. A stream of blood filled his mouth, and he doubled up like a marionette and died.

"'That was really scandalous,' said the other man, pocketing the gold that he had lost and had not been able to win back. Then, tossing down a double whisky, he went out.

"So you see, Freddy, old boy," concludes Gregory Land, getting more and more sorrowful, "that I am a heartless old scoundrel."

He stuffs his pipe. I am about to give him a light, but he grumbles:

"Do you think I'm paralyzed. I can move. What the Devil!"

Using both hands, he gets up and takes a few steps. Then, seizing a coal with the tongs, he lights his pipe.

Happy to have ended this short trip successfully, he declares: "I'm perfectly all right. To-morrow I can get out of your way."

This is his favorite theme, so I let him talk. He sits down again and strikes his leg. That draws a groan from him, and then he begins to bewail his fate. But that doesn't last long with him.

"Enough!" he cries, in a voice of command. "It doesn't hurt any more. Freddy, my friend, excuse me. When I tell you that I'm an old scoundrel, I have my reasons for

## THE DAMNATION OF FAUST

it. It's the absolute truth. You mustn't be angry with me; I have always gone through life with happiness within reach. As so many others have done, I might have picked up a few dollars and returned home and become a gentleman like every one else. It would have been hard at first; but I would have got used to it. I would have had a derby hat and buttoned shoes, and perhaps a wife too. I have often tried to economize by cutting down on my tobacco and whisky. Once I even booked my passage at Skagway. But when the moment arrived to go aboard, I couldn't do it; the wind was blowing from the east, bringing the smell of the country where we are now. I thought of a thousand things—the snow, my dogs, my friends, the trees of the forest, the pines, the thujas, the beeches, the larches, the black rocks of the Pass, the roaring waters of the Yukon, the sea of milky white that one suddenly descries from the top of a mountain pass, the transparent water of the lakes formed in the craters of extinct volcanoes, the sharp pyramid of St. Elias, which the Indians call the Great Mountain, and my rivers—the Tanana, carrying down its floating logs, and the Cooper, in whose metallic waters the salmon cannot live.

"At that moment, I swear, I liked even the tundra with its snares, its mosquitoes that never go to sleep, its gnats, and even its kiss flies that lodge under the finger nails and eyelashes and gnaw the ears of the dogs. I longed

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

for my evenings of solitude and my evenings of feasting with my gay friends.

"I loved my 'land of the pay dirt' for its springtime—when the green, yellow, and red lichens paint bright spots on the landscape; and when one sees the saxifrage, red also, and mingled with the tufts of the white flowers of the dryades, which, alas, live but a few days. I loved it also for its rigorous winter—its dark, cold nights when the mercury freezes in the thermometer, and the river beds form a hard track; and when the restless wolves prowl about, and the great bear comes down famished from the Arctic Circle. I remembered my journeys from north to south, and from east to west—from Chilkoot to Kinging, from the Mackenzie to the mouths of the Yukon—and my long rambles with my team of Labradors and Huskies.

"I was haunted by the memory of the trail, the trail that stretches away to the infinite, offering to the eye the most fascinating mirages.

"I couldn't go away. I stayed.

"Once you have come under the lure of the Great North, it is all over. The country seizes you, holds you, and keeps you in its grasp."

Gregory Land sinks into a distant reverie, and I respect his silence. But soon the mail carrier resumes:

"I told you about Rupert City just now. You know it,

## THE DAMNATION OF FAUST

don't you? Yes, Rupert City—a few dozen wooden houses on the right bank of the Tahkeena, not far from Chilkoot Pass. That's all there is to it.

"In the days of the big rush it was a famous camp. That's where they found plenty of pay! The first comers were lucky fellows—I mean those who hadn't broken their backs crossing the Pass.

"But what a stroke of the pick brings, a throw of the dice sweeps away. There used to be some famous games in Ned Douglas' saloon!

"For Rupert City, like every self-respecting camp, had its saloon; and Ned Douglas, the saloon keeper, a big broad-shouldered brute, was perhaps the only one who didn't have a placer. And yet, he had the mine that brought in the most money.

"I even believe that this infamous brute aided his good fortune by stripping the fellows who won and made the mistake of drinking too much. But I'm not in a position to understand the conscience of Ned Douglas. That's a matter between him and the Lord.

"Success invites competition. Somebody opened another saloon, where the drinks were served by loose women. Ned almost died of apoplexy when to the barmaids the newcomer added a piano for dancing.

"Happily for Ned, his confrère was found at dawn with a knife neatly planted between his shoulders. That's

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

another thing that Ned will probably have to account for when the end of time has come. No one was tempted to take the place of the unfortunate man; and Ned Douglas fell heir to the stock, the girls and the piano.

"From that day, there were epic sessions in the saloon. The gold fever and the alcohol fever rose in the most frightful uproar imaginable.

"That burly brute Ned had perhaps a little poetry in his soul. One evening he seated a pianist at the piano. That was a memorable occurrence; for, until then, any one at all had hammered out any piece of music at all on the instrument. Provided it made a noise, the rest was of little importance.

"The pianist arrived. He was a poor weakling—pale, thin, shivering, and sickly, with the look of a girl. I can still see his white face, animated by two large, dark, sunken eyes that shone like lamps.

"He was received with laughter. Being a practical sort of boss, Ned was afraid that they might ruin his plaything. Knowing his customers, and aware that at bottom they were generous souls, he had a large placard put up in full view, on the piano, with the following notice:

YOU ARE KINDLY REQUESTED NOT TO SHOOT AT  
THE PIANIST  
HE IS DOING HIS BEST

## THE DAMNATION OF FAUST

"This placard made a great hit; and the pianist was accepted. From that time on, he was allowed to grind out—from evening until morning—foxtrots, onesteps, twosteps, and waltzes—for the greater joy of the men and the dancing girls, but especially for the greater profit of Ned Douglas, who, being a practical saloon keeper, made the dancers pay a dollar for each dance.

"The daily life of these people went on in hours of work, pleasure, and suffering. Each one took what fate had in store for him.

"Sandrino—did I tell you that the pianist was a Florentine?—Sandrino did his work conscientiously, in that heavy atmosphere of smoke and alcohol. He was even obliging enough to avoid coughing during the dances. But during the intermissions he would go outside, and then the enchained monster in his breast would break its chains. He would cough and cough until his lungs were torn and a bloody foam came to the corners of his mouth. Then, going back inside—a little paler and his eyes still wider open—he would take a large glass of milk that brought upon him the eternal jests of the whisky drinkers; then, crouching before his "box," straightway he would begin once more to grind out brisk and merry tunes.

"Sometimes a miner who was feeling gay begged Sandrino to play for him a melody of his own country; for all these adventurers, who pretended to have no native land,



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

still retained at the bottom of their hearts a deep concern and a constant longing for the church tower of their native village.

"And Sandrino graciously played for the Irishmen the accompaniment to such songs as *Ireland Must Be Heaven* or *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling*; while each Yankee sang the song of his own state—*Carry Me Back to Old Vir-ginny*, *Back Home in Tennessee*, or *My Old Kentucky Home*. Then we all shouted in chorus:

Yip, i yaddy, i aye, i aye,  
Yip, i yaddy, i aye.  
I don't care what becomes of me  
When I hear that sweet melody. . . .

or else the following:

K-k-k-Katy,  
Beautiful Katy,  
You're the only, only girl that I adore.  
When the m-m-moon shines  
Over the cowshed,  
I'll be waiting at the k-k-kitchen door.

Then an Andalusian would dance and sing:

El hombre que se enamora  
De una mujer del teatro  
Es como aquel que tiene hambre  
Y le dan bicarbonato.

And all the miners of Spanish speech, from old Europe or from the countries of South America, would accompany the dancer, clapping their hands and singing:

## THE DAMNATION OF FAUST

Con el garrotín,  
Con el garrotán,  
A la vera, vera,  
Vera, vera, van.

"Latulipe, a French Canadian from the Province of Quebec, would sing in a thick voice:

Auprès de ma blonde,  
Qu'il fait bon, fait bon, fait bon,  
Auprès de ma blonde,  
Qu'il fait bon dormir.

"And Sandrino, never growing weary, accompanied these popular dances and these absurd refrains. His delicate hands, thin as a monk's and white as ivory, looked like frightened birds fluttering over the keyboard.

"How had he come to be stranded there? After what misfortunes, after what transformations, had this son of the land of sunshine become lost in that polar region? No one ever found out. Sandrino kept to himself a secret that no one, for that matter, ever thought of asking him.

"The dancing girls found his refinement to their liking, when confronted with the usual coarseness of the other fellows. He was all politeness, and his lisping speech was pleasing. Even more so were the classic features of his archangelic face, which stamped him as a guardian for places of ill repute.

"But Sandrino seemed to have no more illusions about

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

love. He must have carried in his heart one of those wounds that are constantly reopened and from which one never recovers.

"Nevertheless, he was amused by Rose, a Luxemburg blonde, who said she was French to please the men. She had offered to join company with him, but he answered kindly that two lives of sorrow could not make one of happiness.

"The girl had not insisted. He was grateful to her for having thought of him; and whenever he received a tip, he bought her some trinket or some finery—a necklace of glass beads or a woolen scarf.

"One evening some scoundrels started a quarrel, and Rose was killed by a bullet that was not intended for her. They carried her out, sprinkled a little sawdust, swept it up, and put the tables in order. Sandrino went on playing dance music for the customers, whose boots hammered the floor where the blood had left a brown stain.

"During the intermission the Italian went out. A fit of coughing came upon him, and the red blood filled his mouth.

"Going outside, I myself found him lying on the ground, with a rattle in his throat. He did not die then, but after that it was impossible for him to go back to his work. Some comrades and I, to whom the 'pay' had been

## THE DAMNATION OF FAUST

generous, made him accept a hundred dollars, so that he might return to his native land.

"He set out. But the Northland is a mistress that one cannot forget. Two months later, Sandrino was back. He had gone as far as Vancouver; but just as he was about to sail for his native country, he suddenly turned his back upon the bright sun of the Pacific, and took the first freighter back to the Land of the Fogs.

"Ned Douglas received him with joy. Once more he took his place before his 'music box,' and we, poor fools, began to dance and sing in chorus our stupid refrains.

"Sandrino was pledged to the north country. There are men who are thus marked by Fate.

"One evening the Saloon at Rupert City was rejoicing. A comrade had discovered a nugget that weighed one pound and six ounces.

"Such finds as that are always celebrated and, of course, they are always celebrated at the saloon. What a spree! My friend, I'll remember it all my life."

The recollection of the feast brings a momentary gleam to the eyes of Gregory Land; but soon his gaze is veiled, as he repeats, in a more muffled tone:

"Yes, I'll remember it all my life.

"We drank like animals—more than animals. An animal knows when he has had enough, and stops. Man is the only animal that can eat without being hungry and

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

drink when he is no longer thirsty. Our intelligence, if we had any, had sunk beneath the claws of our Master, Alcohol. We were surely dead-drunk."

"All of you?"

"Every last one of us, including the dancing girls and even Ned Douglas. And yet, at drinking parties Ned usually knew how to keep a cool head, and for a good reason. But that evening he must have drunk to encourage the others, and the whisky had got the better of the crafty brute's calculations. He had dropped behind his bar, as if knocked on the head. As for us, we were under the tables.

"How long did our drunkenness last? I don't know. But I remember distinctly waking up and thinking that I was in a new dream. My paralyzed body refused to move. It would have been hard for me to move a finger. But my brain had recovered its faculties of perception. I was being lulled by music, sweet and solemn, and my soul was awakening to a reality far more beautiful than my dream.

"Sandrino was at his piano, playing. His hands, which had hammered out in cadence the foxtrots and the weeping melodies, those hands that were whiter and more transparent than ever, animated the instrument and made it vibrate with life. Never would I have believed that a man could pour out his whole soul in that way.

"Sandrino was playing the *Damnation of Faust*. It was

## THE DAMNATION OF FAUST

an ardent return to his real self. The will of the flouted artist was taking its revenge.

"The harmony arose triumphant, purifying evil instincts, base desires, and shady dealings.

"Sandrino was coming out of the filth into which they had lowered him, and was rising fair as a god.

"The musical conception of Berlioz was unfolding itself—rough, abrupt and violent in the chorus of the students and soldiers, then becoming ethereal in the dance of the sylphs. The melodic thought was asserting itself, pure as water from a spring, free from all affectation; and the evocation of Nature arose, like man paying homage to his Creator, with a spontaneous outburst, rich in marvelous tones, unrivaled.

"Then, after the hurricane had been unchained, came the race toward the abyss, full of joy and sorrow. In its rich splendor, the symphonic landscape was unfurled, displaying all the promiscuity and all the hypocrisy of the human soul. Anger and despair, pity, suffering, unheeded aspirations—all this passed by in the rush of the wind, with the gallop of the wild charger carrying man to his eternal damnation.

"Satan's laugh drowned the calls and the cries, and the fantastic race passed on.

"Coming out of their foul drunkenness, the gamblers and girls had straightened up, as if in a hypnotic sleep.



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

There we were, all of us, standing in a half circle, listening, listening, listening.

"The most abject faces, the most villainous physiognomies, to which life had given the harshest masks, began to relax; and the inner joy that every human being carries unwittingly in the depths of his soul arose as if to bring about a transfiguration, lighting up the countenances of the men with a superhuman brightness.

"Yes, the most withered faces, on which vice had placed its claw and left its stigma—these faces, I swear, were beautiful, like those of the chosen who, in the first centuries of the faith, thought in their ecstasy that they beheld the face of God.

"And to impart still greater reality to the picture, breaking away from this state of equilibrium, with that unheard-of gift of contrast that constitutes the genius of Berlioz, Sandrino now interpreted the *Chorus of the Angels*, in which all the mysticism of the faith is concentrated.

"All those men and all those women had long since forgotten God.

"This damnation was like their own. This race toward the abyss was the fantastic race for gold, guardian of the city, procurer of pleasure, giver of consideration, dispenser of fame—and Death was riding past, carrying Life behind his saddle.

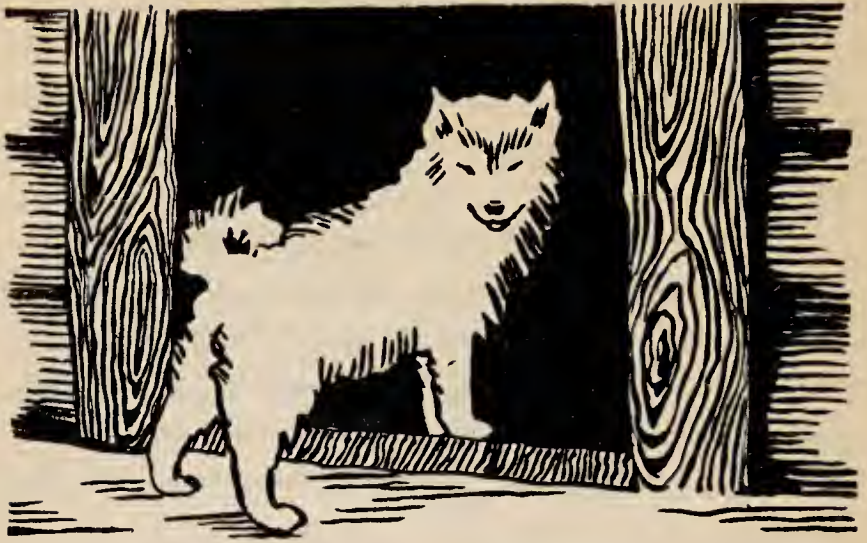
## *THE DAMNATION OF FAUST*

"The unlettered and the unbelievers understood this thing, in their obscure way. Tears diluted the paint on the faces of the girls, and the men wore a stern wrinkle on their brows.

"The last note delivered them from their anguish.

"It was the last note. But the soul of the piano was still chanting and vibrating in the prolongation of the sounds. Motionless, the hands remained on the keyboard.

"Having accomplished his mission, having purified his life, Sandrino bowed his head, as if to accept his fate. He was dead."



## XVIII

### MY DOG TEMPEST AND I

"If you looked at your thermometer from now until to-morrow, you couldn't make it go up one-tenth of a degree. Can't you see that it's frozen solid?"

It is Gregory Land who addresses me in this violent manner.

In a vexed tone, I reply:

"I know it. Mercury freezes at 40 point 12."

"I say 'point twelve,' and this provokes a noise like that of a rusty rattle. That is the peculiar laughter of my friend, the *coursur de bois*. When his fit of hilarity is over, he tosses down two swallows of a mixture in which gin forms one part and whisky the other.

## MY DOG TEMPEST AND I

Without shifting his position, he holds out his hand and takes down his thermometer from the wall. Examining it carefully, he gives a long whistle. I turn round.

Gregory Land explains.

"Damned cold weather we're having! Do you know, Freddy, old boy, that it's now 55 and that we'll reach 60 at daybreak?"

"Fifty-five below zero! By Jove, that certainly is a fine temperature!" But, still grouchy, I retort:

"Your spirit thermometer '*bat la berloque*.' "

"What do you say?"

"I say that your thermometer '*bat la berloque*.' "

And, in order to make him understand the French expression, I touch my forehead with my forefinger.

This expressive gesture is immediately understood by the mail carrier, who hurls at me a repertory of his choicest oaths.

Gregory has the distinction of being able to curse in forty languages or dialects that he has picked up in the course of his wanderings from British Columbia to the Northwest Territories.

I let the wave pass, and then try to convince my guest, by means of the most scientific data, that beyond sixty degrees spirit thermometers lose all their accuracy. In the face of my phrases borrowed from the pick of the latest manuals, Gregory doesn't say a word. But he

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

shrugs his shoulders, which is a sign of profound contempt for all exact sciences, and keeps chewing, which is an irrefutable proof that my conversation interests him no longer.

Sixty degrees below zero! That's something you don't see every day. I open the door and go outside. I simply raise the wolverine collar of my leather jacket. Sixty degrees! Impossible! The air is pure, and nothing disturbs the immense silence of the polar night. The contours of the spruce trees stand out sharply, as if chiseled. But the earth is hard under foot, and that is a sign which is always reliable.

After a moment, I go back inside and say:

"You were right; it's going to be sixty."

Gregory Land grumbles something that sounds like "Of course it is." Before closing the door, I whistle. Ten seconds later, a bristling ball leaps forward yelping. It is Tempest.

This time the mail carrier breaks his silence. Once more he begins to string out his chaplet of curses, adorning them—at the large beads, probably—with appropriate pieces of advice.

"Damn! *Nom d'un chien! Per Dio!* You'll never be able to do anything with that stupid brute. *Diavolo*, the Devil, *Demonio!* To think of raising a dog that way!"

I stop Gregory's speech with a single sentence.

"Tempest isn't a dog."

## MY DOG TEMPEST AND I

"Eh, *bruto!* What is he then?"

"Tempest is my friend."

I say this so seriously that Gregory's grumblings stop short, and his anger disappears with this sentence:

"Oh! In that case, it's all right."

Before the brightly blazing fire, Tempest is toasting his nose and his paws.

When I say: "Tempest is my friend," he gets up, comes and puts his muzzle on my knees, raises his large kind eyes toward me, and sweeps the ashes with his tail.

And, as if to myself, I begin to speak:

"We've known each other for a long time, haven't we, old pal? A friendship like ours must be of long standing. Oh, it isn't a matter of yesterday. You want to know where I came across him? That's a long story. I was still a beginner, and excited the pity and the commiseration of the old-timers when I tried to hitch my dogs or load my sled properly. But I had one thing that made me respected: two hard fists and very little patience. The mockers soon stopped their laughter. Isn't that right, Tempest?"

"Yes, you've always had a hell of a temper," says Gregory, interrupting me and spitting his chew into the fireplace.

"Perhaps. That's the way I am. But aren't you interested in knowing how I got acquainted with Tempest? It was simple enough. I was prospecting to the west of



## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

the Alaskan Alps, along the Tanana River, a tributary of the Yukon that joins the left bank of the latter at Nuklukyet."

"Seventy!" says Gregory.

"What?"

"That's the mark I'm giving you . . . in geography."

"Fool!"

But since I am patting Tempest's head, Gregory cannot take the remark for himself. So I go on.

"One evening at my hut I took in a starving Yukoner wrapped in shabby furs. I didn't care very much for the fellow on account of his evasive look and the vicious crease in his mouth. But, after all, he was a poor unfortunate devil, and you couldn't turn him away, could you?

"In his team he had, as his wheeler, a bitch that was about to have pups. In the morning this man—who, by the way, had drunk my tea and slept under my roof without even saying 'Thanks'—this man hitches his team. When the poor tired bitch shows reluctance, he gives her a kick in the belly that sends her rolling and howling ten paces away.

"I had the same temper then that I have now. You know what I mean. And, besides, I couldn't forget that fellow's boorishness. So I say to him:

" 'You're a big brute!'

"'You mind your own business.'

"That's a remark that I don't like, especially from a man who has slept under my roof and warmed his carcass at my fire. Without replying, I let fly a straight punch that sends him sprawling on the ground.

"I was like a raving maniac. Although he was on the ground, I pounded him with all my might. I really believe that, in addition to my punches, I gave him a few good kicks in the ribs with my hob-nailed shoes, simply to teach him a few manners.

"Tired of striking, I stopped and went back into my hut. When I came out again, the man had skipped, bequeathing to me the poor bitch dragging herself along with groans. That very day her puppies came. Five were born dead, and one was alive. As for the one that was alive, here he is. It was Tempest, this old rascal, this old brother of mine!"

With my forefinger I scratch the dog's head, and this makes him laugh.

"I tell you that Tempest laughs when you scratch his head. I swear to it. His eyes gleam, and his sides shake. And then, he has such a funny way of twisting his mouth."

"All right, all right; I'll take your word for it," says Gregory. "He laughs, he grins."

"Of course he does."

And I go on:

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"I took care of the mother and the son. One morning the mother was crushed to death by a block of ice. As for the son, here he is. I've made a jolly big fellow out of him. We've covered miles and miles together, haven't we?"

Tempest answers with an affirmative grunt.

"And it wasn't always a pleasant job either. Sometimes we dined 'from memory.' Isn't that right? But, on the other hand, we had many a good mouthful of fresh meat whenever we brought down a caribou. And the Mackenzie salmon! What a bellyful! Eh, old brother?

"So we didn't shirk our work. We ran over the trail in every direction, and often we had a hard stage. Once we did as much as sixty-five miles at one stretch—yes, sir, just as I am telling you.

"A sudden rise in temperature didn't look good to me, so we fled before the storm. You know, partner, the woollies that come down from the coast ranges and make the sailors tremble. Sixty-five miles—that's no trifle. The dogs fell down exhausted when they arrived. Tempest was the only one among them that remained unflinching, for Tempest knew that I had saved his hide.

"The other dogs were only stupid beasts. But Tempest is a man—no, he's better than a man; he's a good dog.

"Just as soon as he could stand up, that dog was full of

## MY DOG TEMPEST AND I

pluck. When he was still but a little pup, he used to bite the leader's legs to make him go. And when the leader was unharnessed and ran at him with bared fangs, Tempest would make a stand against him, instead of seeking refuge under the table or between my legs, as a city dog would have done. He got some terrible whippings. Once the skin of his neck was hanging like a rag. That's the sort of thing that builds character.

"Would you believe, Gregory, that he never wanted to be hitched with the team? No, he just had to have the first place right away. He was conscious of his strength and superiority.

"One morning, as I was breaking up camp, the matter was settled between him and Flic, the Labrador that used to lead my team. He was a cautious beast, this Flic. He knew all the tricks of the game. He had knocked about a good deal, and knew that you must beware of these Eskimo Huskies, who are descended from the big black wolf, and who carry within them the fierce heart of their ancestors.

"But the thing had to be brought to an end; the quarrel had to be settled once for all. It was a memorable fight. The pretext? There wasn't any. Tempest had simply placed himself in front of the sled, waiting to be hitched to it as leader.

"Flic accepts the challenge. The other dogs form a semicircle, rejoicing at this unexpected treat. Yes, of

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

course, the body of the loser will be added to their daily fare. Some of them openly show their ravenous hunger without the slightest restraint, clapping their jaws and licking their chops, the eyes of all of them gloating with greed.

"Flic knows that the speediest attacks are the best. He leaps in, but that confounded Tempest jumps aside, and Flic strikes his head against one of the runners of the sled. He is completely stunned by the shock.

"The matter is soon settled. Tempest takes this opportunity to drive his fangs through Flic's throat.

"The powerful beast gets up and shakes Tempest like a rag. Tempest's body swings from right to left, like the clapper of a bell, but he does not loosen the grip.

"Flic is blinded by the spurting blood. Suddenly a prolonged quiver shakes his body; his legs bend, and the beast lies breathless on the snow, while a grayish liquid moistens his eyes. He awaits his fate.

"A single deafening bark rings out. It is the pack rushing upon the victim. Poor Flic!

"Tempest stands aside, gently licking his hair. Then he comes to me for a caress. To set an example, I give him a sound thrashing. Just think! Flic had cost me a hundred dollars. When the drubbing is over, Tempest obstinately takes the leader's place.

"What would you have done? I put the dead dog's

## MY DOG TEMPEST AND I

harness on him, and since that time he has been leading my team like the stout-hearted dog that he is.

"You want to know what he did after that? It would take a book of three hundred and fifty pages, selling at \$1.75, to tell his exploits. He has lived my life, suffered my miseries; and we have rejoiced together in our moments of happiness.

"He knows some things that men will never know. During our evenings of distress, I have told him the secrets that burdened my soul. He has understood my suffering, and sometimes we have both wept together. Yes, Gregory, he has wept real tears. I'm telling you the absolute truth; Tempest weeps."

I think I hear a chuckle coming from Gregory. I get up in a rage.

"Yes, he does weep. He's a sensitive animal, and a lot better than you are! Do you understand?"

Gregory is not moved by such a trifle. He pours himself a big glassful and simply says:

"Didn't I tell you that you had a most damnable temper?"





## XIX

### GOOD-BY, TEMPEST!

"It's the last hour of my last day in the polar regions. Come, my dog; come, my old comrade; let us live together our last moments.

"You see, my trunks are strapped, and soon they will come to get them. Yes, sniff and turn around them. This time we shall not load them on our fast sled. Other dogs will draw them away. They are going away! I am going away! Do you know the full meaning of these words: *going away forever?*

"I am going to leave you, Tempest. Never will you see me again, and never shall I see you again. Nevermore will your kind eyes meet my eyes, and nevermore will my

## GOOD-BY, TEMPEST!

hand pass caressingly over your fur coat. No more shall I scratch your head, no more shall I feel your soft tongue upon my cheek, and no more will you scratch my thigh with your hard claw to ask me for a bite to eat.

"The double canvas sack is empty, and you will no longer carry it on your back, at least not with me. Some one else will be shining your harness, which now hangs on the wall like a useless thing.

"No longer shall we run together from north to south and from east to west. No more rambles in the snow, through the forest and over the tundras. The trail has passed out of my life.

"Come, old friend; eat the meat prepared for you. Yes, eat; it is my wish. You shake and lower your head, as if you were at fault; your ears lie back and your hind legs double up.

"Tempest, you are stricken with grief; I know it, I feel it, I see it.

"No, please don't look at me like that. Your eyes have a look of reproach. Listen to me, old boy. I *must* go away. I have my home over there, and there I must return—a country where snow is an accident, where the sea is of a deep blue that blends with the blue of the sky.

"I cannot stay here any longer. Alas, I haven't made my fortune. But I have lived; and my life has been less hard, less pitiless, because I had you.

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"You have borne my sufferings and shared my joys. For months we belonged to each other, living side by side, the one standing by the other.

"And you are the better of the two.

"I was often nervous—you know, the hours hang heavily at times. Forgive me. In spite of everything, I loved you. Not being a man, you were faithful to me.

"Ah! Do you remember our frolics in the snow at Dawson? And the days when we used to roll down the slopes?

"Come here. Put your head on my knee and raise your ear. Tell me, do you remember Jessie Marlowe?

"Hush! You mustn't speak of it. If you meet her some day on the trail, you will go up to her, yelping and wagging your tail, and you will say: 'Take a good look at me. I am his dog, his very own.' Seeing you alone, she will understand that I am gone.

"Going away! What a frightful thing it is! What heart-rending and what anguish it means! A lump comes into my throat. My mouth is dry; I cannot speak.

"Your comrades are far away, yet their absence has caused me no sorrow. The man took them away, but I kept you—only to lose you soon.

"You will stay with Gregory. I have given you to him; give him a little of your affection. He will come and get you when I am no longer here. You will follow him, and

## *GOOD-BY, TEMPEST!*

you will love him. You will love him a little less than me, won't you? But love him just the same. He didn't want to be here at my departure. You see, he is a man. He doesn't want to show that, down in his heart, he feels a little sad because he has to leave me. . . . This evening he will probably be drunk, but don't be angry with him. You will watch over his sleep, as you used to watch over mine. He's a good fellow. He won't whip you—out of respect for my memory.

"No, I cannot take you with me. That is impossible.

"What's that? Oh, yes, I know. Come on. Is that you, Jack? Good morning. Take away the boxes. I'll cut across the trail and join you soon. Wait for me near the clump of spruce trees. Let me give you a lift. . . . Yes, that's Tempest, my dog. . . . No, he's going to stay here with Gregory Land. . . . A fine dog? You bet he is! . . . You say you'd give three hundred and fifty dollars for him? He's worth all of that, but Tempest is not for sale. I've given him away. . . . Yes, that's right. Good-by, old boy.

"Well! . . . It looks empty here. . . . What gloom! Come, cheer up. We'll have to leave each other now. . . . Let me get my sack, my rifle, and my club. You want me to give you a kiss? Why, of course, I will. . . . Good-by, Tempest. Good-by, my good friend, my true friend, my only friend!

## THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE

"I am crying, yes, crying—just like Gregory. I am only a man. No! Please don't whine! My heart is breaking. . . . Come, you're a good boy, and I love you. Good-by.

"You want to follow me? As far as the slope, then. I am willing.

"Let's go. Come, run, frolic and be happy! . . . You're in no mood for fun, poor old fellow."

I set out, but my legs are dead tired, as after a long journey. Never before have I noticed the steepness of this slope. What a Calvary!

" . . . And now, you must go back. Go, Tempest, go. Return to the cabin; go back to what was our home. You will search there, and you will find the scent of your master. I, your master? No, your equal, your pal, your brother. . . . Keep for me a secret corner in your faithful dog's heart. . . . Go, go, go. . . ."

. . . I am standing on the top of the hill. Tempest is going down the slope—slowly, pitifully. At every third step, he turns his head to see whether I am going to call him back. His belly sweeps the ground, and his tail trails behind him.

"Go, go, go. . . ."

At last he reaches the cabin. Sitting down on the doorstep, he looks at me for the last time. For the last time, I see his kind imploring eyes, moist with tears.

## *GOOD-BY, TEMPEST!*

"Go, go, go. . . ."

With his paw he pushes the door. Tempest has gone back into the cabin; he has passed into my memory.

Henceforth he is out of my life. I shall see him no more—never, never, never.







## EPILOGUE

Over a modest grave in the Cimetière Montparnasse, in Paris, stands a simple slab of black marble with the following inscription:

Ci-gît

**Louis-Frédéric Rouquette**

Né le 19 août 1884

Mort le 10 mai 1926

How strange that such a spot should be the last resting place of this restless globe-trotter, who, during so large a portion of his short but eventful life, had wandered over four continents and as many seas, from the burning sands of the Sahara to the frozen solitudes of the Far North! Ever seeking to escape the haunting memories of the past, he had hoped that face to face with Nature he might find the peace of mind that he had vainly sought in the cities of the civilized world. And he himself had expressed the wish that he might some day sleep beneath the eternal polar snows, in the midst of the Great White Silence that he loved so well.

Lest the reader think that the man described in the

## EPILOGUE

introduction to this book is an impossible person, created by an overactive imagination, we present the following brief summary of the checkered career of Rouquette, sometimes known as the French Jack London:

Born at Montpellier in 1884; received a classical education in the *lycée* of that city and later studied the fine arts and medicine; went to Morocco at the age of eighteen, before the French occupation; returning to France, he became in turn painter, sculptor, poet, writer of songs and short plays, journalist, and political orator; received an appointment from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was sent by his country in 1914 to organize the French exhibit at the San Francisco Exposition; returned to France at the outbreak of the World War, was mobilized, but rejected for active service on account of physical disabilities; was sent to Washington on a diplomatic mission in 1915 and was received by President Wilson; took up propaganda work for the French cause; enlisted as a volunteer in the Mexican army; became a gold miner in California and Nevada; journeyed to Alaska and the Yukon in 1916, going through the experiences related in *The Great White Silence*; made a cruise in the South Atlantic, off Cape Horn (related in *Les Oiseaux de tempête*); journeyed across Iceland in 1922 (related in *L'Île d'enfer*); became a fisherman off Newfoundland; joined the crew of a whaling expedition to northern Greenland (related in an unfinished, posthumous work entitled *La Grand'Route du pôle*); sent by the French Government to confer the cross of the Legion of Honor upon certain missionaries of the Canadian Northwest (related in *L'Épopée blanche*); died in a Paris hospital in 1926, at the age of forty-two.

THE TRANSLATORS.









# Date Due

JAN 15 1996

NOV 21 1995

APR 11 2003

APR 02 2003



0 1164 0299470 5

PQ2635 .O96G713  
Rouquette, Louis Frédéric,  
1884-1926  
The great white silence

DATE

ISSUED TO

273122

273122

